

Deal Pentecostal Church Sermon Outlines 2014

69 Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. CT14 9EW www.dealpentecostal.co.uk

Paul S Fermor

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Memory Verses - Prayer

Good sound Theology (the study of God) will enable us to live a blessed, contented and peaceful life, regardless of our circumstances. In every situation we will be able to defend our minds and souls from attacks of doubt, distress, discouragement, despondency and even depression as we use the *shield of faith to extinguish every attack.*^{Eph.6:15} And so this year our **Memory Verses** are on the theme of **Prayer**. As we remember, recite and recollect these Scripture verses each month it is important to realise that this is not a technique to get what we want in life. But rather this is a means of building the truths of God's Word into our life and consciousness in total dependence on the Holy Spirit. **Make your lips do their duty; fill them with the Word of God.** Make them say what God says about you and your situation and don't allow them to say anything to the contrary.

Church is not just about "theology" but it is about interacting with God and each other – we call it FELLOWSHIP! Please take advantage of opportunities that arise to bless one another with encouraging conversations as well as being with each other. The children in our congregation are an integral part of our Church and they especially need our encouragement and support. Jesus said: *"Therefore every teacher... who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."* Let's admire and appreciate the old and new treasures that we find from God's Word and then share them with others.

"I want you to know that we pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling and that by his power he may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Remember

God wants us to prosper and enjoy good health, even as our soul prospers.

**We belong to the family of Believers, so wherever we are,
let us continue to think, act, talk, sing and give as Believers!**

We are too blessed to be stressed!

January:

I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Eph.3:16-17

Sunday 5th January 2014 Ps.119:145-152

The Good Food Guide

All food is good and given by God. In some parts of the world food is scarce and people have no choice in what they eat – actually to eat anything is a luxury! But most of us do have plenty of food and so we can enjoy our meals as we indulge in our own personal preferences – what we eat is our own personal choice. *Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.*^{Gen.9:3-4}

Under the OT, God gave strict food rules to help people understand that He was holy (clean) and that they too should be holy. *You must not eat any of the animals that crawl on the ground, including those that crawl on their stomachs, that walk on all four feet, or on many feet. They are to be hated. Do not make yourself unclean by these animals; you must not become unclean by them. I am the LORD your God. Keep yourselves holy for me because I am holy. Don't make yourselves unclean with any of these crawling animals. I am the LORD who brought you out of Egypt to be your God; you must be holy because I am holy.*^{Lev.11:42-45}

During the transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant some of these regulations overlapped. *Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood (the Jerusalem Council was AD49/50).*^{Acts15:20}

Later those food regulations were dropped and just a year later when Paul wrote to the Church at Thessalonica he made no mention of food: *As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality (written AD 51)*^{1Thess.4:1-3}

Nine years after that, Paul clearly explained that all food is “clean” and therefore may be eaten: *As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil (written AD 57/58).*^{Rom.14:14-16}

Although we often focus on our body (because it is tangible i.e. we can see it, touch it, smell it), we are much more than our physical body – we are spirit. Our spirit is the immaterial God-conscious part of us and is not influenced by material things like food. Food does not make us clean (holy) or unclean (unholy). *Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body. (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.') He went on: What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'*^{Mk.7:17-23} *Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.*^{Acts 10:9-23}

Neither does food make us more spiritual or less spiritual. *But food does not bring us near to God;*

we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.^{1Cor.8:8} Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.^{Col.2:16}

For Believers under the NT, the only rules about food we have are that we should give thanks to God for our food and be mindful of weak Christians who have not yet understood about the freedom that Christ has given us.

They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.^{1Tim.4:3-5}

“Everything is permissible”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible”—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake—the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.^{1Cor.10:23-33}

Some early Christians were superstitious and were afraid of “idols” thinking that they were “gods”. So then, here is what I say about eating food that is offered to statues of gods. We know that a god made by human hands is really nothing at all in the world. We know there is only one God. There may be so-called gods either in heaven or on earth. In fact, there are many “gods” and many “lords.” But for us there is only one God. He is the Father. All things came from him, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord. He is Jesus Christ. All things came because of him, and we live because of him. But not everyone knows that. Some people still think that statues of gods are real gods. When they eat food that was offered to statues of gods, they think of it as food that was offered to real gods. And because they have a weak sense of what is right and wrong, they feel guilty. But food doesn’t bring us close to God. We are no worse if we don’t eat. We are no better if we do eat. But be careful how you use your freedom. Be sure it doesn’t trip up someone who is weaker than you.^{1Cor.8:4-9}

The equivalent situation today would be eating Islamic “*halal*” meat or food from an Asian Restaurant that has images of Hindu “gods” or a statue of Buddha. The Believer is in no spiritual danger from such food as these statues are not real “gods”.

Although food is important for our body it is more important that we honour God in the way we live: *You know the old saying, ‘First you eat to live, and then you live to eat’? Well, it may be true that the body is only a temporary thing, but that’s no excuse for stuffing your body with food, or indulging it with sex. Since the Master honours you with a body, honour him with your body!*^{1Cor.6:13}

But the really big question is: What is your Spiritual food? Spiritual food is more important than our physical food and is the Word of God. *Man doesn’t live only on bread. He also lives on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*^{Matt.4:4} *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*^{Ps.119:103} *They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*^{Ps.36:8-9} *On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines... he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces.*^{Is.25:6-8} *Jesus said, My food is to do what my Father sent me to do. My food is to finish his work.*^{Jn.4:34}

Just as a baby grows up and develops teeth to chew food so we must grow up and develop our ability to “chew” more than just the Sunday sermon! We should be able to take the great truths of our Faith and explain them to others. *We have a lot to say about that.*

But it is hard to explain it to you. You learn too slowly. By this time you should be teachers. But in fact, you need someone to teach you all over again. You need even the simple truths of God's word. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk is still a baby. That person does not want to learn about living a godly life. Solid food is for those who are grown up. They have trained themselves with a lot of practice. They can tell the difference between good and evil. So let us leave the simple teachings about Christ. Let us grow up as believers.^{Heb.5:11-6:1}

This analogy of a baby is very apt because although we will make mistakes and sometimes get hurt, we will grow if we keep “chewing” on God’s wonderful salvation i.e. talking to one another about. *So get rid of every kind of evil. Stop telling lies. Don't pretend to be something you are not. Stop wanting what others have. Don't speak against each other. Like babies that were just born, you should long for the pure milk of God's word. It will help you grow up as believers. You can do it now that you have tasted how good the Lord is.*^{1Pet.2:1-3}

Let's make sure we aren't still living like unbelievers like the Church at Corinth.

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature.^{1Cor.3:1-3}

Sunday 12th January 2014 Ps.119:152-160. Jn.10

Have you heard God speak to you?

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.^{Jn.10:27}

A Christian is someone who follows Christ after he has listened to His voice. It is not enough to appreciate Christ’s teaching and admire Him from a distance – we are expected to actually follow Him and make Him our model & example.

When Jesus called His disciples, He said to them “*Follow Me*”^{Matt.4:19;8:22;9:9} Andrew and Philip were disciples of John the Baptist and they were baptising people in preparation for the imminent arrival of the promised Messiah when they first met Jesus.^{Jn.1:35-42} But it was some time later when they were fishing in Galilee that Jesus asked them to follow Him.^{Matt.4:19} Following Christ involves total commitment because it may result in discomfort, distress or even death and so Jesus gave them time to consider their obligations before deciding to follow Him. *Then Jesus said to his disciples, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*^{Matt.16:24} *Anyone who loves his life will lose it. But anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it and have eternal life. Anyone who serves me must follow me. And where I am, my servant will also be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.*^{Jn.12:25-26} Their response was not a spontaneous rash decision taken during an emotionally-charged “meeting” but was a deliberate, rational decision taken after much thoughtful consideration. Later when others deserted Jesus, those Disciples re-affirmed their commitment: *At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “Are you also going to leave?” Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.*^{Jn.6:66-69}

In contrast to the Jews who clearly heard Jesus’ words but tried to kill Him, Jesus said: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life.*^{Jn.10:26-28} Note the sequence: **listen** to His voice (hear); **respond** by following; then Jesus gives **eternal life**. In this context, hearing from God is the way to salvation not the result of salvation. It is something that happens to non-believers that leads to their belief. It is not a skill possessed by believers as a result of having belief and subsequent relationship with God. There is a vast difference between merely “hearing” and actually “listening”. To “listen” is to *bear and obey*. It is only those who pay attention to what Jesus says who will receive the

benefits of the Kingdom: *To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them... For the hearts of these people are hardened and their ears cannot hear and they have closed their eyes - so their eyes cannot see and their ears cannot hear and their hearts cannot understand and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.*^{Mat.13:11-16}

But what does it mean for Believers to hear Jesus' voice? There are many Christians who are disheartened and defeated, even sometimes questioning their own salvation, because they have not heard God “speak” to them. **So how does God speak to us?**

How do we hear what God has to say? *For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it. He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they lie in their beds. He whispers in their ears and terrifies them with warnings. He makes them turn from doing wrong; he keeps them from pride. He protects them from the grave, from crossing over the river of death.*^{Job.33:15-18} Although God may speak to us through circumstances, dreams and even sickness, God does not leave it up to chance, ability or education as to whether we can hear Him or not.

God has spoken clearly to us through Jesus Christ: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*^{Heb.1:1-2} **And the only reliable information we have of Jesus is**

the Bible: *You study the Scriptures carefully. You study them because you think they will give you eternal life. The Scriptures you study give witness about me. But you refuse to come to me and receive life.*^{Jn.5:39-40} *We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*^{2Pet.1:19-21}

But do we need to hear directly from God each day? Paul did not counsel the Corinthians to seek a “word from God” when he chastised them for not working out their own legal differences. Instead he asked, “Isn't there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these issues?”^{1Cor.6:5}

God's wisdom recorded in the Scriptures and applied by the indwelling Holy Spirit, is God's provision to enable every Believer to live a victorious life. God expects us to follow (put into practice) the sound principles of God's Kingdom. *I am your servant; therefore give me common sense to apply your rules to everything I do.*^{Ps.119:125 TLB}

God has promised to give wisdom to those who ask. *If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver,*^{Jas.1:5-6} This does not mean that God simply tells us what to do (i.e. God speaks and we listen). That is not wisdom, because even a fool can follow directions! Wisdom is skill at living; it is insight into the way the world works - applying our knowledge. Merely following orders requires no discernment, no deliberation, no knowledge, no reflection and no understanding - in short, no wisdom.

There's a difference between receiving revelation of some sort (“God told me...”) and growing in wisdom, or gaining insight to unravel a problem, or getting creative “*inspiration,*” or experiencing the outworking of a spiritual gift. Special revelation is extremely rare and carries with it a unique authority. By contrast, creative inspiration or insight is common, especially for the Christian actively depending on God and leaning on Him for help: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil.*^{Psm.3:5-7} There is a big distinction between “God gave me this song” or “God told me how to fix my sink” and “My ability or inspiration or insight come from the Lord”. If God really

gave the song, we're not free to rewrite (or sell!), partly because they're God's words, not ours and also because improving God's song seems like a contradiction in terms.

However, if we see God as the spiritual force behind our gifts and accomplishments, we can pray for wisdom, help, inspiration, and creative solutions to vexing problems expecting Him to respond without being committed to saying "God gave me this song" or, "God told me where to find my keys" or, "God spoke to me about how to fix my plumbing". If God wants to communicate, He will succeed and we will not fail to hear Him even if we are deaf!

God has given us the Holy Spirit (who is also called the *Spirit of wisdom*^{Jk.11:2;Eph.1:17}) to *guide us into all Truth*:^{Jn.16:13} *Jesus grew in wisdom*^{Lk.2:53} and God expects us to be *full of wisdom*^{Acts.6:3} and to be able to hear what the Spirit is saying: *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches*.^{Rev.2:} **The Spirit speaks through the Scriptures.** Arguably, the greatest movement of

God's Spirit in the last 1000 years was the Reformation. It was not started by a "prophetic word" that someone had "from God" or a "whisper from God"! No it was started by a verse of Scripture: "The just shall live by faith." Martin Luther was simply listening to the only Word of God we are ever enjoined to hear, know, and obey - the Bible. **Putting God's Word into practice is true Godly wisdom:** *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man*.^{Matt.7:24} **Spiritual maturity is the ability to know, understand, and apply Scripture in every circumstance.**

This works^{1Thes.2:13} **so let's keep learning and applying God's Word!**

Sunday 19th January 2014 Ps.119: 161-168 John 10

Can we take the Bible seriously? *Scripture is always true*.^{Jn.10:35}

Can we really take the Bible literally or is it old-fashioned or even just a metaphor? Many people struggle to understand the Bible because they are constantly being told it is irrelevant and out-dated. However the purpose of the Bible was never to record science, history or "religion" but rather to record God's plan of salvation as revealed in Jesus Christ. Throughout the Bible and especially Psalm 119, God repeatedly affirms that His Word (*His written revelation*) is *trustworthy, settled, eternal, righteous etc.* Jesus Himself said: *Scripture cannot be broken (set aside, altered; is always true)*.^{Jn.10:35}

So how should we read the Bible? Is it really reliable or should we adapt it to our culture and modern values? Should we take the Bible literally *literal* or *lateral*? Is the "devil" of the Bible real and should we take "sin" as seriously as the Bible does? Very recently the media reported: *Parents and godparents no longer have to 'repent sins' and 'reject the devil' during christenings after the Church of England rewrote the solemn ceremony. The new text, to be tested in a trial lasting until Easter, also drops the word 'submit' in the phrase 'Do you submit to Christ as Lord?' because it is thought to have become 'problematical', especially among women who object to the idea of submission.*^{www.dailymail.co.uk}

The word "*literal*" means "taking words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or allegory, free from exaggeration or distortion." Why do people balk at this common-sense notion when it comes to the Bible or, more precisely, certain passages in the Bible? Even non-Christians read the Bible in its "*usual or most basic sense*" most of the time on points that are not controversial. They readily take statements like "*love your neighbour as yourself*" or "*remember the poor*" at face value. When citing Jesus' directive, "*Do not judge*" they're not deterred by the challenge, "*You don't take the Bible literally, do you?*" No, when critics agree with the point of a passage, they take the words in their ordinary and customary sense. They naturally understand that language works a certain way in everyday communication, and it never occurs to them to think otherwise.

Unless, of course, the details of the text trouble them for some reason. What of the story of Creation? Is it a straightforward account describing historical events the way

they actually happened? Were Adam and Eve real people and the first human beings? Was Adam created from dust? Did Eve really come from Adam's rib? Did Jonah actually survive three days in the belly of a great fish? Did a virgin really have a baby? Such claims seem so fanciful to many people that it's hard for them to take the statements at face value. Other times, the critics simply don't like what they read. They abandon the "literal" approach when they come across something in the text that offends their own philosophical, theological, or moral sensibilities. **Jesus the only way of salvation? No way! Homosexuality a sin? Please! A "loving" God sending anyone to the eternal torture of Hell? Not a chance!**

Notice that the objections are not based on some ambiguity making alternate interpretations plausible, since the Scripture affirms these truths with the same clarity as "love your neighbour." No, these verses simply offend. Suddenly, the critic becomes a sceptic and sniffs, "You don't take the Bible literally, do you?"

Obviously some passages of the Bible are to be taken figuratively – as a metaphor. A metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable...a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else." Metaphors take one meaning of a word and then creatively leverage it into another meaning to make an impact on the reader. So, we must first understand the literal meaning of "shepherd" to understand the intended meaning of Psalm 23. The Gospels abound in metaphors, especially in Jesus' teachings: *I am the Door, I am the Bread of Life, I am... etc.*

Let's look at one BIG word in Scripture that is unequivocal (can only mean one thing).

PROPITIATION. This word is used just four times in the Bible. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith.^{NET} God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.^{NIV}) This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.^{Rom.4:23-26 ESV} Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover.^{Heb.9:4} He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.^{1John 2:2} In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins.^{1Jn.4:10}*

To understand what this powerful word "**PROPITIATION**" means, we need to first understand just how strongly God feels about sin and justice. Perhaps the word that most aptly sums up how God feels about sin and what level of justice is required to appropriately deal with sin is: **wrath**. Imagine being angry. Now imagine being really, really, angry about something you hate. However angry you can imagine getting, you are still only experiencing an infinitesimal amount of how angry God feels about, and how much He hates, injustice caused by sin. **PROPITIATION** is God unleashing His fury and wrath upon someone so that His need for justice is satisfied and the guilty can receive mercy. This word does not occur in the Old Testament. Instead the Old Testament word is: atonement.

The Old Testament pre-illustrates the truth of the New Testament. It dramatically portrays propitiation and atonement in a ritual ceremony called Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Described in Leviticus 16, on this most holy day, two goats were presented to the High Priest. Lots were cast for which goat would be made the sacrificial offering for the sins of the people. The High Priest laid his hands on the head of the doomed goat and the sins of the people figuratively transferred to it before it was killed. The goat

not chosen to be sacrificed (by the short straw) was then released alive into the wilderness – the “Scape Goat”.

This is a picture of us before God. When we approach God two things become immediately clear: (i) We are unjustifiably guilty; and (ii) God is furious about our guilt! But we are not standing before God alone. As God pronounces judgment against us, the One standing beside us steps in front of us to take our punishment and bear the wrath of God. The One standing beside us is Jesus Christ. He is the Yom Kippur Goat. We who have accepted Him as our **PROPITIATION** are like the goat that is allowed to escape.

The purpose of the Bible – the “bigger picture” is always God’s plan of salvation as revealed in Jesus Christ. Remember, meaning always flows from the larger units to the smaller units. Without the bigger picture, you’ll likely be lost.

Don’t forget the rule: Never read a Bible verse. Always read a paragraph at least if you want to be confident you’re getting the right meaning of the verse.

Do I take the Bible seriously? Yes and I try to take it at its plain meaning unless I have some good reason to do otherwise. This is the basic rule we apply to everything we read - to novels, newspapers, periodicals and poems. **Why should the Bible should be any different?**

Sunday 26th 2014 Ps.23 Jn.11.

This sickness will not end in death.^{Jn.11:4}

Does life end with death? Or is there more to our existence than this physical life?

The *Resurrection of the Dead* is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: *I believe in... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.*^{Apostle’s Creed} This “I Believe” is not just in “life everlasting” but also in a **Judgement** by a holy and righteous God who shows no favours and overlooks nothing. *I believe in Jesus Christ... he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.*^{Apostle’s Creed} This judgement is final and there will be no appeal or pardon available then. The only appeal that we can make to God is **before** that final judgement. If we appeal to God **NOW** and ask for His pardon on the basis that He has already provided forgiveness in Jesus Christ, we can be sure of a full pardon – see last week’s notes on **PROPITIATION** (especially regarding the *Day of Atonement* where one goat dies but the other lives).

Jesus said *Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He will not be found guilty. He has crossed over from death to life. What I’m about to tell you is true. A time is coming for me to give life. In fact, it has already begun. The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. Those who hear it will live.*^{Jn.5:24-25} This is the 1st Resurrection: *Blessed and holy are those who take part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them. They will be priests of God and of Christ.*^{Rev.20:6}

Death is separation (see Adam’s death which was separation from God^{Gen2:17;3:10}). **If we hear and believe what God has said (regarding His Son Jesus Christ) then physical death will have no power over us.** Jesus told her, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this?”*^{Jn.11:23-26} Death should hold no fear for the Believer because Jesus destroyed the devil’s power of death and the fear it brought: *The One who makes people holy and the people he makes holy belong to the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters... [They] have bodies made out of flesh and blood. So Jesus became human like them in order to die for them. By doing that, he could destroy the one who rules over the kingdom of death. I’m talking about the devil. Jesus could set people free who were afraid of death. All their lives they were held as slaves by that fear.*^{Heb.2:11-15} *Our natural bodies don’t last forever. They must be dressed with what does last forever. What dies must be dressed with what does not die. In fact, that is going to*

happen. What does not last will be dressed with what lasts forever. What dies will be dressed with what does not die. Then what is written will come true. It says, "Death has been swallowed up. It has lost the battle."^{1Co.25:8} "Death, where is the battle you thought you were winning? Death, where is your sting?"^{1Io.13:14} The sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law. But let us give thanks to God! He wins the battle for us because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done.^{1Co.15:53-57}

Although this sounds fine in theory, in practice we have emotions and an innate fear of the unknown. Even Paul said that although he longed to have his eternal body, he did not want to actually die (*be naked*): *We know that the earthly tent we live in will be destroyed. But we have a building made by God. It is a house in heaven that lasts forever. Human hands did not build it. During our time on earth we groan. We long to put on our house in heaven as if it were clothing. Then we will not be naked. While we live in this tent of ours, we groan under our heavy load. We don't want to be naked. We want to be dressed with our house in heaven. What must die will be swallowed up by life. God has made us for that very purpose. He has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment. The Spirit makes us sure of what is still to come. So here is what we can always be certain about. As long as we are at home in our bodies, we are away from the Lord. We live by believing, not by seeing. We are certain about that. We would rather be away from our bodies and at home with the Lord. So we try our best to please him. We want to please him whether we are at home in our bodies or away from them. We must all stand in front of Christ to be judged. Each one of us will be judged for the good things and the bad things we do while we are in our bodies. Then each of us will receive what we are supposed to get.*^{2Co.5:1-10}

So how do we prepare ourselves for that certain event of being dressed with our house in heaven?

God has already done most of the work - He has given us the Holy Spirit as a down payment! **This "down payment" of the Holy Spirit is a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come:** *He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*^{2Co.1:21-22} The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit is not a Pentecostal Doctrine but a Christian Doctrine! We ignore the Holy Spirit at our peril! His ministry is to Counsel, Comfort Encourage, Help, Be-friend, Guide - in fact everything that Jesus did for His first Disciples^{Jn.14:16} and also to empower us to witness.^{Acts1:8}

We should regularly re-affirm that we are Believers: *Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular check-ups. You need first-hand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.*^{2Co.13:5} If we are Believers then we know whom we have believed and are persuaded...^{2Tim.1:12}

We should renew our minds: *be made new in the attitude of your minds.*^{Eph.4:23} This "renewal" or "transformation" of the mind is a process in which believers begin to think in new and right ways as they meditate on the truths of God's Word. *So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.*^{Col.3:1-2} We should take time each day to re-align our thoughts to see everything from God's perspective: *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*^{2Co.4:18} *With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.*^{Rom.12:1-2}

This renewing (or re-aligning) of our minds is done by "meditating" on God's Word (who is Jesus). Meditate means *contemplate, ponder, think, consider, reflect, ruminate; muse.* **We should meditate on what God has accomplished through Jesus - NT truths** (including those

found in the OT). Psalm 23 is not only the most famous Psalm but probably the most **faith-filled** Psalm when we understand it's true meaning through Jesus our *Good Shepherd*.^{Jn.10:14} This Psalm has helped millions of Believers in the 3000 years since David wrote it and it is still relevant today, especially when we face uncertainties, including death. **Is death the end to life? No it is not! And we know that death is not the end because Jesus died and rose again with an immortal body and then gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of eternal life.** Because we believe (trust) Jesus, we are not only recipients of eternal life but we are also preparing ourselves for the transition of mortality to immortality by re-aligning our thoughts with God's thoughts as recorded in the Bible.

Rise up within me Lord Jesus Christ

and cause me to triumph and walk in victory every moment of this day!

February:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Eph.3:17-18

Sunday 2nd February 2014. Ps.119:169-176 Matt.7:24-28

How to live a holy and happy life.

The story of the 2 builders^{Matt.7:24-28} shows that it is not only what you build that counts, but how and where you build that matters too. The bigger the building, the more important it is to have a good foundation. What looks grand and important may actually be a very dangerous place to live if the foundation is not secure. This is also true of our lives but fortunately God has given us instructions on how to build our lives safely and securely. If we heed His advice - *hear [His] words and put them into practice*^{Lk.6:47} - we will live a happy and holy life; but if we ignore God's advice our life *will collapse with a mighty crash*.^{Matt.7:27}

Here are 3 principles for living a happy (and holy) life: *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, **rooted** and **built up** in him, **strengthened** in the faith as you were taught, and **overflowing** with thankfulness.*^{Col.2:6-7}

1) Private walk with God - Rooted in Him;

2) Public walk with God - Built up in Him;

3) Producing fruit - Strengthened in the faith and overflowing with thankfulness;

1) Private walk with God: Rooted in Him. Roots are underground – unseen and private. This is our personal relationship with God (*how we relate to God outside of the Church meetings*). Our personal fellowship with Jesus Christ is essential for our spiritual life and our natural life. We must cultivate a regular “inter-action” with God where we meditate (*ponder or contemplate*) on God's Character – what He is like; what He has said; what He has done. We hear from God through the Scriptures and by checking our facts about God with what the Bible actually says, especially about Jesus Christ. *But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.*^{1Cor.3:10-13} *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together*

and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.^{Eph.2:18-22} By building our lives on Jesus Christ (His values) we not only have a solid foundation to our lives but we are also fed with all the spiritual nutriment that we need.

2) Public walk with God: Built up in Him. Buildings or branches are above ground and visible. This is our public walk with God (*the way we relate to God in Church and also in the community*) and it is built on our private walk with Him. Church ministries and services are not an end in themselves but they are a means to *prepare God's people to serve. If they do, the body of Christ will be built up. That will continue until we all become one in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son. Then we will be grown up in the faith. We will receive everything that Christ has for us. We will no longer be babies in the faith. We won't be like ships tossed around by the waves. We won't be blown here and there by every new teaching. We won't be blown around by the cleverness and tricks of people who try to hide their evil plans. Instead, we will speak the truth in love. We will grow up into Christ in every way.*^{Eph.4:12-15} Although not everyone is called to preach publicly, we are all “*ministers of God*” (i.e. *His servants*) and our Church meetings should proclaim Jesus in such a way that all of us are equipped to share our faith (*what we believe about God*) concisely and credibly. If our public walk with God is not the same as our private walk with Him, then we are “*play-acting*” (the Greek word is “*hypocrite*”)! *Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theatre, but the God who made you won't be applauding. When you do something for someone else, don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—'play-actors' I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out. Pray with Simplicity and when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom!*^{Mat.6:1-5}

3) Producing fruit: Strengthened in the faith and overflowing with thankfulness. Fruit is the plant's produce – how they re-produce themselves. This not only produces the next generation but also provides food to help others. Our fruit is our character or personality – who we really are – and the Holy Spirit is building these qualities into us: *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*^{Gal.5:22-23} The basis of spiritual fruit (*godly character*) is **FAITH – the simple yet settled total confidence in God based on His Character (what He has done) and His Word (what He has said).** *God's power has given us everything we need to lead a godly life. All of that has come to us because we know the One who chose us. He chose us because of his own glory and goodness. He has also given us his very great and valuable promises. He did it so you could share in his nature. He also did it so you could escape from the evil in the world. That evil is caused by sinful longings. So you should try very hard to add goodness to your faith. To goodness, add knowledge. To knowledge, add the ability to control yourselves. To the ability to control yourselves, add the strength to keep going. To the strength to keep going, add godliness. To godliness, add kindness to believers. And to kindness to believers, add love. You should possess more and more of those good points. They will make you useful and fruitful as you get to know our Lord Jesus Christ better. But what if some of you do not have those good points? Then you can't see very well. You are blind. You have forgotten that your past sins have been washed away. My brothers and sisters, be very sure that God has appointed you to be saved. Be sure that he has chosen you. If you do everything I have just said, you will never trip and fall. You will receive a rich welcome into the kingdom that lasts forever. It is the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*^{2Pet.1:3-11}

When both our private and public walk with God is genuine and sincere, we automatically produce good fruit – **fruit that honours God and helps others**. As we remember that God has forgiven our sins and that He has appointed us to be saved, we will not doubt that *the LORD will fulfil his purpose for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever.*^{Ps.138:8}

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.^{Phil.1:3-6}

Yes we can live a holy and happy life. It is not impossible live a holy and happy life nor is it meant to be difficult - it is merely a matter of producing good fruit. **And this comes from being citizens of heaven on earth by building our life on Jesus Christ as our Foundation**^{1Cor.3:11} **and Cornerstone.**^{Eph.2:20;1Pet.2:7}

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.^{Eph.3:17-18}

Sunday 9th February 2014 Ps.120 Jn.12:1-19

Do you serve a dead Jesus or a living Jesus?

There is a dichotomy in the Gospels between Jesus the Carpenter who came from Nazareth and Jesus the Christ who came from heaven. The Carpenter Jesus lived an ordinary life (even though His nativity was extra-ordinary) for 30 years as part of an ordinary family: *Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?*^{Mk.6:3} But when Jesus was about 30 years old, He began His extra-ordinary life as the Christ - **the Promised Messiah**, living out the Bible promises concerning the Christ which had been recorded from the beginning of human history. The 1st of these promises had been made to the devil personified as a snake (but in the hearing of Adam and Eve): *I will put hatred between you and the woman. Your children and her children will be enemies. Her son will crush your head. And you will crush his heel.*^{Gen.3:15} The problems of the world would be resolved when the Seed comes and crushes the devil's head but there will also be a wounding (*crushing/bruising*) of the Seed's heel This theme recurs throughout the whole of the OT from the Patriarchs, through to Moses, the Judges, the kings (especially David) and the Prophets, culminating with John the Baptist – the last of the OT Prophets. *I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is! And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it [until now, eager multitudes have been pressing into the Kingdom of Heaven]. For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!*^{Matt.11:11-15}

When John saw Jesus, he cried out, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' I did not recognize him as the Christ, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."^{Jn.1:29-31} From that time on, Jesus lived His extra-ordinary life as He preached and lived out those promises given hundreds of years previously. Matthew includes at least 7 times: *this fulfilled the word of the Lord...*^{Matt.8:17} or *this fulfilled the prophecy...*^{Matt.12:17}

The people had enough evidence that Jesus was the Prophet who was to come (i.e. the Messiah) *Moses said, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' Then Moses said, 'Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God's people.'* Starting with Samuel, every

prophet spoke about what is happening today.^{Acts 3:22-24} **However many still had trouble believing:** *When the crowds heard him say this, some of them declared, "Surely this man is the Prophet we've been expecting." Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others said, "But he can't be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born." So the crowd was divided about him. Some even wanted him arrested, but no one laid a hand on him.*^{Jn. 7:40-44} **Even some of Jesus' disciples doubted and left Him:** *At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."*^{Jn. 6:66-69}

As Jesus' ministry continued, the evidence for His Identity (i.e. that He was indeed the Christ) became overwhelming and so the scene was set for Jesus to conclude His ministry by "crushing the devil's head"^{Gen. 3:15} but the devil was also getting ready to "crush Jesus' heel": *So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death.*^{Jn. 12:53}

Acknowledgement of the facts is different from confidently and completely placing your trust in them. Although the facts about Jesus were indisputable, not everyone was willing to place their faith in Jesus. But some (often women) understood and Scripture provides us with an insight into their revelation. When Mary, out of her appreciation for Jesus, poured a pint of pure nard (a very expensive perfume) on His feet, Jesus said: *It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial.*^{Jn. 12:7} Yes, Mary had understood that **Jesus was the "Seed"** who would "crush the devil's head and that the devil would crush his heel"^{Gen. 3:15} and so she symbolically prepared Jesus for His death and burial. *But the servant was pierced because we had sinned. He was crushed because we had done what was evil. He was punished to make us whole again. His wounds have healed us. All of us are like sheep. We have wandered away from God. All of us have turned to our own way. And the LORD has placed on his servant the sins of all of us.*^{Is. 53:5-6} **But that was 2000 years ago and we know that Jesus rose from the dead 3 days after He died.**

Sadly many people today are still preparing Jesus for His burial – they try to honour Him as if He was still on the cross or in the tomb. **But Jesus is alive – He rose from the dead, ascended to His Father in heaven and will return to finally (and completely) destroy the last enemy – death.** *Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.*^{1Cor. 15:54-57} *The time will come when the Lord will make everything new. He will send the Christ. Jesus has been appointed as the Christ for you. He must remain in heaven until the time when God makes everything new.*^{Acts 3:19-21}

The resurrected, ascended Jesus is not the same as the child Jesus who worked as a carpenter. He is not even the same as the Prophet Jesus who God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power and went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.^{Acts 10:38} When Jesus obeyed His Father completely even to His death, God honoured Him with the greatest Name – **LORD OF ALL:** *but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings.*^{Rev. 17:14} *Jesus appeared as a man. He came down to the lowest level. He obeyed God completely, even though it led to his death. In fact, he died on a cross. So God lifted him up to the highest place. He gave him the name that is above every name. When the name of Jesus is spoken, everyone's knee will bow to worship him. Every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow to worship him. Everyone's mouth will say that Jesus Christ is Lord. And God the Father will receive the glory.*^{Phil. 2:8-11}

The Resurrected Jesus has an immortal body and He is now worshipped with awe and respect as *“My Lord and my God!”*^{Jn.20:28} *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. But he laid his right hand on me and said, “Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.”*^{Rev.1:17-18}

We dare not try to worship Him as a carpenter, a good person, a martyr, or even a prophet. Neither can we worship Him on the cross or in the grave because *Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.*^{Rom.6:9-11} *Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.*^{1Thes.1:10}

To honour Jesus as less than LORD OF ALL is to dishonour Him and to dishonour His Father too! *Then all people will honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Those who do not honour the Son do not honour the Father, who sent him.*^{Jn.5:23}

Remember we serve a Risen Saviour: *Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.*^{2Tim.2:8}

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today.
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.
I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer;
And just the time I need Him, He's always near.
He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

Sunday 16th February 2014. Ps.121 Jn.12:20-50

Faith Speaks

Just like the psalmist who wrote, “I believed it, so I said it,” we say what we believe.^{2Cor.4:13}

It's not what you say are, but what you say, you are! Our conversation lets other people know what we really think and believe, regardless of what we “profess” to believe - we talk about what we enjoy and are passionate about: *The mouth speaks the things that are in the heart. [It's your heart, not the dictionary, that gives meaning to your words.]*TM *Matt.12:34*

The theme of John's Gospel is FAITH (trusting God) and this faith is motivated and confirmed by miraculous signs and God's glory. *This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.*^{Jn.2:11} But if we haven't actually seen Jesus physically, we are not excluded from believing – in fact we are more blessed if we accept God's written record of Jesus than those who actually witnessed Him performing miracles: *Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen me but still have believed.” Jesus did many other miraculous signs in front of his disciples. They are not written down in this book. But these are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.*^{Jn.20:29-31} Faith that saves us (gives us eternal life) is available to all, not just to those who physically met Jesus.

In chapter 12, John uses Isaiah as an illustration of someone who had seen God's glory in Christ as the *Mighty King* and also as the *Suffering Servant*. Because God (the Father) cannot be seen, when people see God, they see God the Word (the Father's Son): *No one has ever seen God. But God, the one and only Son, is at the Father's side. He has shown us what God is like.*^{Jn.1:18} God had promised peace and success to His people when they stayed true to

Him and worshipped Him alone.^{Deut.28} But during Isaiah's time the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile by Assyria as God's judgement for rebelling against Him.^{2Kg.17:7;18} It was in these troubled times that Isaiah saw God's glory: *I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple*^{Is.6:1} as Micaiah had 150 years before: *Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the multitudes of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left.*^{1Kg.22:19}

Isaiah was commissioned to go and speak to God's people even though God had said that they would not listen. As this passage is quoted 5 times in the NT, it obviously has significance. *Go and say to this people, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend.' For the hearts of these people are hardened and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see and their ears cannot hear and their hearts cannot understand and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.*^{Is.6:11} (see also *Matt.13:14-15; Mk4:12; Lk8:10; Jn.12:40 Acts28:26-27*)

Throughout the OT we see examples of people who closed their minds and although some of them (such as Pharaoh) had their hearts hardened by God, they were still personally responsible for their behaviour: *Pharaoh... sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh's heart was hard... just as the LORD had said through Moses.*^{Ex.9:34-35}

To have just a glimpse of God's glory will change our lives if we don't harden our hearts (close our minds) toward God as some did in the past: *Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today! The LORD says, "Don't harden your hearts as Israel did... in the wilderness.*^{Ps.95:6-8}

Moses was shown God's glory when he sheltered in the "cleft of a rock" (*Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." The LORD said, "I will make all of my goodness pass in front of you. And I will announce my name, The LORD, in front of you. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. And I will show love to those I love. But you can't see my face," he said. "No one can see me and stay alive." The LORD continued, "There is a place near me where you can stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in an opening in the rock. I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand. You will see my back. But my face must not be seen.*^{Ex.33:18-23}

This was an illustration of Jesus – *the Rock*^{1Cor.10:4} who was "hit" to release water (water represents the Holy Spirit who was sent after Jesus died and returned to heaven): *Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out.*^{Ex.17:6} *Jesus said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."* By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. *Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified!*^{Jn.7:37-39}

Like Moses and Isaiah, we must see God's glory in Jesus. *Isaiah... saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.*^{Jn.12:41} *The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the one and only Son. He came from the Father. And he was full of grace and truth.*^{Jn.1:14}

Although Isaiah saw God's glory in the *Mighty King* upon His throne and filling the Temple,^{Is.6:1} he also saw God's glory in the *Suffering Servant* who was *punished to make us whole.*^{Is.53:5} So John used that Scripture to explain that experiencing the miraculous or having a "spiritual" experience is not enough: *Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*^{Is.53:1; Jn.12:37} Even hearing God speak from heaven^{Jn.12:29; 2Pet.1:16-19} is not enough to receive eternal life – we must place our trust in Jesus, God's Son as our Saviour: *Jesus—the Divine Christ! He experienced a life-giving birth and a death-killing death. Not only birth from the womb, but baptismal birth of his ministry and sacrificial death.*^{1Jn.5:6} *For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who*

believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.^{Jn.3:16-21}

Faith talks! So when Isaiah saw God's glory in Christ as the *Mighty King* and as the *Suffering Servant*, he talked about it too: *Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.*^{Jn.12:41} **Jesus said that we will be His witnesses**^{Acts1:8} **which is simply talking about what we know and believe about Jesus.** The action of talking about what we believe consolidates our thinking which helps us understand more. *I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.*^{Philemon1:6} The NKJV emphasises that our witnessing becomes effective when we acknowledge the "good things" in us: *that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.* Talking about Righteousness (being counted right with God by trusting Jesus: *Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.*^{Rom.4:3}) and *living righteously* is maturity: *Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant (non-speaker), is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*^{Heb.5:13-14}

Let's continue to talk about God's glory and miracles: *It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me. How mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.*^{Dan.4:2}

But let us also ensure that we build ourselves up in the faith^{Jde.1:20} **and encourage & strengthen others in the faith too!** *We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through.*^{1Thes.3:2-3}

Sunday 23rd February 2014. Ps.122. Jn.13.

How successful are you? Are you important enough to serve?

Importance is usually measured by success which brings a sense of satisfaction and achievement. But Jesus taught that God defines success very differently from this world. The world measures success by **quantity** ("how much" or "how many") but God measures success by **quality** ("how faithful" or "how loving").

Last week we saw that the theme of John's Gospel is **FAITH** (*believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and belonging to Him*^{Jn.20:29-31}) and that this faith is motivated and confirmed by miraculous signs and God's glory. But not everything that Jesus did was "miraculous" – actually much of what He did was *ordinary* but it became *extra-ordinary* when accompanied by God's glory.

Jesus was the very best "Teacher"^{Jn.13:13} and He used miraculous signs to illustrate spiritual truths which amazed people: *When he taught ...everyone was amazed and said, "Where does he get this wisdom and the power to do miracles?"*^{Matt.13:54} *In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.*^{Mk.4:34}

When Jesus was coming to the end of His time on earth, He wanted to emphasise to His Disciples the main teaching of God's Kingdom which is **LOVE IN ACTION**.^{Jn13:1} So Jesus taught them by instruction and example by washing their feet! This task would normally have been performed by a servant but Jesus was showing them that God's Kingdom is different from this world's kingdom. There is no "**hierarchy**" (from Greek *hierarkhiā* - *the rule of a high priest*) in God's Kingdom where people are elevated to

positions of importance – only a “**lower-archy**” where the least is the greatest and humility is the highest quality: *For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest.*^{Lk.9:48} *Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus told them, “In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called ‘friends of the people.’ But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves.*^{Lk.22:24-27}

Jesus taught that we should do the work but not claim the credit and certainly not use ministry to manipulate others or control them: *But you shouldn’t be called ‘Rabbi.’ You have only one Master, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth ‘father.’ You have one Father, and he is in heaven. You shouldn’t be called ‘teacher.’ You have one Teacher, and he is the Christ. The most important person among you will be your servant. Anyone who lifts himself up will be brought down. And anyone who is brought down will be lifted up.*^{Matt.23:8-12}

Another translation puts it this way: *Don’t set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let him tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of ‘Father’; you have only one Father, and he’s in heaven. And don’t let people manoeuvre you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them—Christ.* We could also include “apostle,” “prophet,” “pastor,” “evangelist,” “elder,” and “deacon” in here too!

Neither Paul nor Peter used their ministry description of “apostle” as a title and they never addressed themselves as “Apostle Paul” or “Apostle Peter.” *Paul, called (to be) an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God;*^{1Cor.1:1} *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*^{1Pet.1:1} An “apostle” is a

“messenger” - someone who has been “sent” – it is a description of someone’s ministry never a “status” to use (or even to claim): *There was a man sent (apostle) from God whose name was John.*^{Jn.1:6} *Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger (apostle) greater than the one who sent him.*^{Jn.13:16} In fact Paul was very clear that the ministry of

“apostle” was by mutual agreement and could never be imposed: *Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*^{2Cor.9:2}

Just because we are God’s family of “brothers and sisters in Christ” and so all equal, does not mean that we are “socialists”. “Socialism” is “a system of social organization in which the means of producing and distributing goods is owned collectively or by a centralized government.” Historically, socialism deteriorates into a corrupt system because nobody really owns anything and so no one is actually personally responsible for looking after anything.

Usually some people eventually become “more equal than others” and tyranny reigns!!!

Christianity emphasises that we are all personally accountable to God for our behaviour – our action, arguments and attitude.^{Matt.5:21-30} *God is kind but He’s not soft.*^{Rom.4:2} *On judgment day, people will have to account for every careless word they have spoken.*^{Matt.12:36}

We all have been given different abilities by God and He expects us to be good stewards of what we have – to be the best, to the best of our ability. *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.*^{1Pet.4:10} *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.*^{1Cor.4:2} *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!*^{Matt.25:23}

But even good stewardship without love is worthless: *If I have... but do not have love, I am nothing.*^{1Cor.13:1-3} It is this love that Jesus lived and taught - practical, personal and spiritual love. It is about attitude as much as action where we put our energy into serving rather than being served; ministering rather than being ministered to; caring rather than controlling.

I was being considerate of you, not indifferent, not manipulative. We’re not in charge of how you live out the faith, looking over your shoulders, suspiciously critical. We’re partners, working alongside you, joyfully expectant. I know that you stand by your own faith, not by ours.^{2Cor.1:23-24} *We are*

servants of Christ... We are guides into God's most sublime secrets, not security guards posted to protect them. The requirements for a good guide are reliability and accurate knowledge. It matters very little to me what you think of me, even less where I rank in popular opinion. I don't even rank myself. Comparisons in these matters are pointless. I'm not aware of anything that would disqualify me from being a good guide for you, but that doesn't mean much. The Master makes that judgment. So don't get ahead of the Master and jump to conclusions with your judgments before all the evidence is in. When he comes, he will bring out in the open and place in evidence all kinds of things we never even dreamed of—inner motives and purposes and prayers. Only then will any one of us get to hear the “Well done!” of God.^{1Cor.4:1-5}

Because washing the Disciples' feet was such an important lesson, Jesus asked “Do you understand what I have done for you?”^{Jn.13:12}. Words are cheap but actions really do speak louder than words. *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*^{Jn.13:15} The lesson that Jesus was teaching (which is fundamental to the Kingdom of God) was: **TRUE SUCCESS (importance) IS TO SERVE in loving submission to God and His rules (principles) The benefits are great too – a blessed, contented, happy, fulfilled and satisfied life.** *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*^{Jn.13:17} **God's Kingdom is a blessed kingdom and those who live by His rules are truly blessed:** *You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule. You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought. You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat. You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for. You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world. You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family. You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom. Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me.*^{Matt.5:1-12}

Success is a good aspiration but to achieve it we must put Love into Action - we are too important not to serve!

I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.^{Matt.25:40}

March:

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. Eph.6:19

Sunday 2nd March 2014. Ps.123. Judges 6-8.

Will you trust and obey God regardless of the “odds” against you?

Why do we have problems if God is with us? Why doesn't God just “do a miracle” for us like He did in the Bible stories?^{Jdg.6:13} You may have heard these questions

before or even asked them yourself. But they are not new questions – Gideon asked them over 3000 years ago. Gideon is included in the great “Hall of Fame” of OT Believers: *Gideon... by faith ...overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised [him]... [His] weakness was turned to strength. [He] became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight... [He] earned a good reputation because of [his] faith, yet [did not] receive all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that [he] would not reach perfection without us.*^{Heb.11:32-40}

Yet Gideon did not start out as a “Faith Giant”. He lived in difficult times and had no reputation in his community: *My family group is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh. And I'm the least important member of my family.*^{Jdg.6:15} When a prophet explained God's way out of the difficult times, the people ignored his advice so God sent an angel to inspire and encourage Gideon to face up to the situation and help the people to overcome their problems. Like Moses^{Ex.3-4} and the Samaritan woman,^{Jn.4:19-20} Gideon immediately came up with questions to excuse his unbelief: *Pardon me, my lord, but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.*^{Jdg.6:13} The very wording of these questions showed how little Gideon believed God: ***if the LORD is with us; ...where are all his wonders? ...the LORD has abandoned us.*** **A truth not practised, is a truth not believed!** Theology without faith is theory, and faith without action is unbelief. Or to put it another way: **our belief is seen in our behaviour.** Gideon didn't have the advantage that we have of the Bible as God's complete revelation of His plan of redemption, or the personal assurance that the “Word [who became] human”^{Jn.1:14} would be *with us always, to the very end of the age*^{Matt.28:20} and the promised endowment of power from the Holy Spirit.^{Acts 1:8} But even with all of these advantages there many people today who live in fear because they doubt God's character, ability and Word. **Faith will always take action:** *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense).*^{Jas.2:17} **But we don't need a lot of faith – just living faith!** *The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”*^{Lk.17:5-6}

God is a generous God – generous and abundant in every way, including His attitude and action! *Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*^{Rom.5:17} *They feast on the abundance of your house,*^{Ps.36:8}

We too should be generous in our attitude and action! *A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*^{Pron.11:25} *the righteous... are always generous and lend freely;*^{Ps.37:25-36} *You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*^{2Cor.9:11}

In spite of Gideon's unbelief, God did not condemn or criticise him but encouraged him to: *Go in the strength you have*^{Jdg.6:14} - in other words, “don't wait until you feel up to the task – start now with what you have and God will help you overcome.” Neither will God condemn or criticise us if we ask Him for help: *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives*

generously to all without finding fault (without reproach, reprimand, criticising, or an unkind word) and it will be given to you. ^{Jas.1:5} Gideon's faith was young and weak and he needed a lot of encouragement so he asked God to do something extra-ordinary to help him believe (prove to him that God was telling the truth)! The wet fleece and dry floor was supposed to confirm God's word: *If you will [do] as you have promised— look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.* ^{Jdg.6:36-40} But this "fleece" did not produce faith: *Allow me one more test with the fleece.* ^{Jdg.6:39} In the end it was an unbeliever's dream that settled it for Gideon! ^{Jdg.7:9-15} **Miracles do not produce faith, and neither does praise or prayer (although faith will be enhanced by all of these) - faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ: So faith comes from hearing the message. And the message that is heard is the word of Christ.** ^{Rom.10:17} Let us expect to receive miracles from God ^{Ps.77:14} and let us praise and pray with all of the passion and enthusiasm we can muster but let us be in no doubt that faith comes from hearing about Christ. **That is why it is imperative that we speak about what we believe about God.** *It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak.* ^{2Cor.4:13} **Although God answers prayer, it is faith that He responds to.** *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* ^{Heb.11:6}

God and us will always be a majority! God wanted the Israelites to always rely on Him, so He asked Gideon to put the army in an impossible situation by reducing them to a mere 300 men to take on the enemy of 135,000 (making the ratio 450:1 against them!) saying: *I do not want Israel to brag that their own strength has saved them.* ^{Jdg.7:2} This was just what God had warned the Israelites about years before because He knew that their memory was short! *If you start thinking to yourselves, "I did all this. And all by myself. I'm rich. It's all mine!" - well, think again. Remember that GOD, your God, gave you the strength to produce all this wealth so as to confirm the covenant that he promised to your ancestors - as it is today. If you forget, forget GOD, your God, and start taking up with other gods, serving and worshiping them, I'm on record right now as giving you firm warning: that will be the end of you; I mean it—destruction. You'll go to your doom—the same as the nations GOD is destroying before you; doom because you wouldn't obey the Voice of GOD, your God.* ^{Deut.8:17-20} When the day of battle came Gideon did just what God had told him to – he really did *trust and obey* God and the outcome was victory! Believing and doing go together. one person multiplied by God's power equals victory no matter what the odds - God and you will always be a majority! **This is where PRAISE comes in –taking God at His word, speaking about it and acting on it!**

The blowing of the trumpets (representing praise) by Gideon and the 300 soldiers **did not give them the victory – God did!** *With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.* ^{Ps.108:13} *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.* ^{2Cor.2:14} By doing what God had said, Gideon showed that he really had placed his complete trust in God. *[His] weakness was turned to strength. [He] became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight... [He] earned a good reputation because of [his] faith.* ^{Heb.11:36-40}

Gideon was a man who was willing to do exactly what God wanted him to do, regardless of his own judgment as to the plans or results. Humility, faith, and obedience were his great elements of character and Gideon's story teaches us the lesson that we should always give God the honour as we "trust and obey". **Let's be ready to do God's will at any time, at any place, and in any way that the Holy Spirit leads.** *For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.* ^{Phil.4:13}

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way!

While we do His good will, He abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies, but His smile quickly drives it away;

Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear, can abide while we trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share, but our toil He doth richly repay;

Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross, but is blessed if we trust and obey.

But we never can prove the delights of His love until all on the altar we lay;

For the favour He shows, for the joy He bestows are for them who will trust & obey.

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet or we'll walk by His side in the way.

What He says we will do, where He sends we will go; never fear, only trust and obey.

Sunday 9th March 2014 Ps.27. Jn.14.

What does it mean to be “in Christ”? *When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*^{Jn.14:20}

Christians have died to their old way of living and now represent Christ by following him. *For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*^{Col.3:3} That is why Believers' baptism is much more than a mere ritual – it is the re-enactment (not pre-enactment) of our spiritual re-birth: *For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.*^{Rom.6:4} With our life hidden with Christ, our identity is now joined to His identity – His righteousness becomes our righteousness; His holiness, our holiness; His strength, our strength. *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.*^{Is.61:10}

Being “**saved**” means that we are **saved from death** and **saved for life – but life on God's terms**. And to enable us to live on God's terms (by God's rules), He actually takes up residency within us: *Jesus replied, "All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them.*^{Jn.14:23} Our spirit is joined to God's (Holy) Spirit: *But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*^{1Cor.6:17} *But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.*^{Rom.8:9-11}

Christians are under the jurisdiction of the “New Covenant” which is far superior to the Old Covenant: *But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises.*^{Heb.8:6} Under the Old Covenant God was worshipped in a specific place (the Temple in Jerusalem); with specific rituals (keeping festivals and food laws); through a specific method (a human priest). Under the New Covenant God is worshipped anywhere (we are God's Temple^{1Cor.6:19}); with no rituals (in Spirit and in truth^{Jn.4:23-24}); through Jesus Christ as our High Priest. Under the OT the Holy Spirit visited people and left them;^{Jdg16:20} under the NT the Holy Spirit permanently resides **in us** (not just **with us**) and He will never leave us.^{Heb.13:5-6} *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*^{Jn.14:16-17}

Below are some statements from Scripture about being “in Christ”.

Remind yourself of them regularly and read them out aloud if you ever doubt God. Make your lips do their duty; fill them with the Word of God. Make them say what God says about you and your situation and don't allow them to say anything to the contrary. **Remember, worry is a “vote of no-confidence” in God!**

I am Included in Christ. *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.*^{Eph.1:13}

I am in Christ because of God. *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*^{1Cor.1:30}

I am a new creation in Christ. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*^{2Cor.5:17}

I am Blessed with every Spiritual Blessing in Christ. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*^{Eph.1:3}

I am Alive in Christ. *In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*^{Rom.6:11} *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*^{1Cor.15:22}

I am Accepted in Christ. *to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.*^{Eph.1:6 NKJV}

I am Complete in Christ. *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*^{Col.2:9-10} *(and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.)*^{NKJV}

I am Strong in Christ even if I feel weak. *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*^{2Cor.12:10}

I am Standing Firm in Christ. *Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.*^{2Cor.1:21}

I am Rich in Christ even if I feel poor. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*^{2Cor.8:9}

I am Free in Christ even if I feel bound. *[This matter arose] because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.*^{Gal.2:4} *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*^{Rom.8:1}

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.^{Col.3:1-4}

Remember to Whom you belong

I belong to Jesus Christ - I am His.

I am His: God defends me, corrects me, makes use of me, loves me and delights in me.

I am twice His: by original right (I was created by God) and by purchase (I was redeemed by God).

I am my Beloved's and He is mine: No-one else possesses any right or power over me. All that is mine is His. All my sin, weakness and shortcomings I give to Him. He has taken all my condemnation, misery and fear. His strength is my strength; His

righteousness is my righteousness; His wisdom is my wisdom and His holiness is my holiness.

I am His child and He is my Father: His family is my family and His heaven is my home - He is my God. **Yes, I belong to Jesus Christ.**

Sunday 16th March 2014. Ps.124 Jn.15.

God is looking for spiritual fruit not religious nuts!

Last week we looked at “**in Christ**” - what it means to be “**in Christ**” (to have God reside within us). We saw that God put us “**in Christ**” and that the result of being “**in Christ**” is that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing, that we are alive, accepted, complete, strong, standing firm, rich (even if we feel poor) and free (even if we feel bound)!

This week we are following the same theme and looking at what it means to “**remain in Christ**”. **Remain in me, and I will remain in you.** *For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.*^{Jn.15:4-5}

Fruit is our character and God wants good fruit i.e. a holy life (which is also a whole life). Although God has *put us in Christ*,^{1Cor.1:30} **we have a responsibility to remain in Christ - we must make the right choices**^{Heb.5:14} **and we must renew our minds**^{Rom.12:2;Col.3:10} **if we are to produce the fruit that God wants from us.** God wants *spiritual fruit* i.e. *fruit of the spirit* (which is the character of the Holy Spirit): *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*^{Gal.5:22-23} Contrast that with the godless life: *It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.*^{Gal.5:19-21}

God gives us a new spirit at conversion but our soul is **our responsibility** and **we** have to make it yield to God. *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*^{Ps.43:5}

Difficulties can strengthen our character and sanctify (save) our soul (i.e. enable us to become like Jesus – holy, pure and clean and ready to meet God face to face): *Through faith you are kept safe by God's power. Your salvation is going to be completed. It is ready to be shown to you in the last days. Because you know this, you have great joy. You have joy even though you may have had to suffer for a little while. You may have had to suffer sadness in all kinds of trouble. Your troubles have come in order to prove that your faith is real. It is worth more than gold. Gold can pass away even though fire has made it pure. Your faith is meant to bring praise, honour and glory to God. That will happen when Jesus Christ returns. Even though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, you believe in him. You are filled with a glorious joy that can't be put into words. You are receiving the salvation of your souls. It is the result of your faith.*^{1Pet.1:5-9}

Fruit is also food. *Then God said, "I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that bears its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food.*^{Gen.1:29} Spiritual fruit is not just about being like God, it is also about feeding others - helping them to be like God too. When we live holy lives (lives that honour God) we are producing food that will edify, encourage and strengthen others. We do this

by **showing** (by our example so others can imitate us) and also by **sharing** (by partnering with others in our work).

Showing: it is important that we **show** others how to live a godly life in every situation and to be a model for them to follow: *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*^{1Cor.11:1} *We did this... in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.*^{2Thess.3:9} *Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*^{Heb.13:7} It is always easier to follow someone else than to be a pioneer and take the lead. We can learn from their examples and try not to make the same mistakes: *Those things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who are living at the time when God's work is being completed. So be careful. When you think you are standing firm, you might fall.*^{1Cor.10:11-12} *Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. The Scriptures give us strength to go on. They cheer us up and give us hope.*^{Rom.15:4}

Sharing: it is also important for us to **share** with others and **there is synergy in sharing** (i.e. we can do more together than we can do independently). *Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*^{Ecc.4:12} Right at the very beginning God established the principle that “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”^{Gen.2:18} Whilst marriage is not for everyone, no one should be isolated: *God sets the lonely in families.*^{Psa.68:6} Church is a **fellowship** of saints and the early church **devoted** themselves to the **fellowship**.^{Acts.2:42} When we choose not to meet together we “lash out at common sense”: *An unfriendly man (whoever isolates himself) pursues selfish ends; he defies all sound judgment.*^{Pron.18:1r} To meet together in Jesus’ name is not only honouring to God but also helpful to us: *Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*^{Heb.10:23-25}

Fruit happens naturally when the plant is good and the conditions are right. But we must work at “weeding” by removing any obstacle to God’s life working in us. For Believers under the New Covenant, this “weeding” is not the curse of Adam’s fall: *God told the Man: “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from... the very ground is cursed because of you; getting food from the ground will be as painful as having babies is for your wife; you'll be working in pain all your life long. The ground will sprout thorns and weeds, you'll get your food the hard way, planting and tilling and harvesting, sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk, until you return to that ground yourself, dead and buried; you started out as dirt, you'll end up dirt.”*^{Gen.3:17-19} No! For Believers, our “weeding” is like Adam’s original work of gardening: *The LORD God put the man in the Garden of Eden. He put him there to work its ground and to take care of it.*^{Gen.2:15} This word “**work**” is also translated “**worship**”: *I am the LORD your God. Worship me. Then I will bless your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you.*^{Ex.23:25} **To tend our lives for God’s glory is true worship.** Worship is not wearisome or difficult but we must stay alert to ensure no weeds, wild plants or wrong fruit grow up. *Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring. True wisdom comes from God If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honourable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favouritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.*^{Jas.3:12-18} *Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity. Keep a sharp eye out for weeds*

of bitter discontent. A thistle or two gone to seed can ruin a whole garden in no time. Watch out for the Esau syndrome: trading away God's lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite. You well know how Esau later regretted that impulsive act and wanted God's blessing—but by then it was too late, tears or no tears.^{Heb.12:15-17}

True spiritual fruit is guaranteed if we remain in Christ by staying connected to Him and consciously communing with Him throughout each day and this will also prevent us from becoming “religious nuts” too! *We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honour and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.*^{Col.1:9-10}

Sunday 23rd March 2014. Ps.125

As I am away today, I have included an article by Greg Koukl from www.str.org

Must We Believe Jesus Is God?

If you believe in Christ but reject His unique deity, you might have a very nice religion, but can you call it Christianity?

Must a person believe that Christ is God in order to be saved? I don't think it is necessary for you to be aware of that doctrine and hold to it before you can become a Christian and receive forgiveness. But I think that you have to know some doctrine in order to be a Christian, in order to receive God's gift of salvation. I think it is a very fundamental and basic doctrine that you need to know. Basically, you need to know your need and God's provision in Jesus, and then respond to that by trusting Jesus for your salvation. In other words, you trust in the person of Jesus Christ. It may be after that that you find out that Jesus is also God. You don't need to know that Jesus is God before the fact.

In fact, I don't think that the early church had a precise view of that like we do now. I think some of the details of this were worked out in the history of the church during the first couple of centuries. I think it's all there inherent in the Scriptures. I think the early church believed in the divinity of Christ but wasn't sure what to make of that. They weren't sure exactly how all that worked out, and they didn't bother themselves with it because their job at that point wasn't to refine their theology; it was first of all, to get the basic Gospel out and, secondly, to stay alive. So it wasn't till later that they refined these things.

I don't think that a person can repudiate the deity of Christ and call themselves a Christian because I think that the notion of the deity of Christ--God becoming man, God in three persons, one essence--is an essential defining doctrine of the faith. In other words, if you reject an essential or defining doctrine then you cannot call yourself by the title that is defined by these doctrines.

Every word has a definition and usually the definition entails a couple of different things that make the full definition, and if the details are not there, you can't apply the word. The same is true of "*Christian*." The word Christian and being a Christian entails a couple of particular things historically. One of those particular things is that **you believe in the unique deity of Jesus Christ** - God become man, Jesus Christ being fully God and fully man, two natures, one person. If you reject that, you might have a very nice religion, but you just don't have Christianity. **So in that sense you can't be a Christian and reject the deity of Christ.**

Part of the reason I would say that, is that it doesn't seem to me that you can deny the nature of God - the nature of the God of the Scripture - and still call yourself a Christian. John says "*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in*

truth."^{John 4:24} In other words, there are some fundamental things you have got to have right about God or at least not be willing to repudiate. You can learn them, but once you repudiate them you are repudiating the very God you are saying you are seeking to worship. This is a **God who is one God in essence and in substance, but has three persons, Father, Son and the Spirit**; and the second person, called the *Logos* in John 1, takes on humanity, becomes a real man such that **Jesus Christ is one person with two natures--the full nature of divinity and the full nature of humanity**. And if you reject such a thing, I don't see how you can then say "I have put my faith in Jesus" because the Jesus that you put your faith in is not the Jesus of the Scriptures, and it is only the Jesus of the Scriptures who really saves you.

So I think that it's actually very critical and I think it's important to point out that Paul himself talked about *another Jesus* that was preached that some unfortunately accept, but a Jesus that is contrary to the Jesus of Scriptures. In fact, Jesus warned in Matthew 24 that one characteristic of the end times is the fact that false messiahs would come and claim to be someone special and mislead many. And I think that false messiahs are individuals who claim to be messiah or else substitute definitions for the Jesus of Scripture. I think the denial of the deity of Christ is such a substitution.

The Scripture teaches clearly not only that **any old god won't do**--and we see that in statements like, *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me,*^{Exodus 20:2-3} - the first commandment in fact. **We must have the correct God before us**. By the same token, **any old Jesus won't do either!** Jesus says "Unless you believe that I Am, you shall die in your sins."^{John 8:24} According to Jesus it was very critical that we have a particular belief about him, and if we don't then we are lost in our sins.

It isn't enough to simply believe in Him. And by the way, that text in John 8 is when Jesus was addressing particular people who had believed in Him in some fashion. **But one needs to have an accurate belief in Jesus, not just any belief in Jesus in order for the true Christ to be their saviour**. I think that those are very critical distinctions and we have to hold to those if the word Christian is going to continue to mean something in particular and not just any religious thought that has to do with some man or any man named Jesus.

Sunday 30th March 2014. Ps. 126 Jn.16. Mothering Sunday

Who is the Holy Spirit and what does He do?

The Holy Spirit is essentially God (God in essence), however the word "God" is not a **Name** but a **Title** like "Queen," "President" or "General". It's helpful to think of it as a public office, for example "the Queen" is the title of a **position**, but it is a unique **person** (Elizabeth Windsor) who occupies that office and fulfils its duties. **In the same way, "God" is the title of the position or office but His Name is "Yahweh"** ("Jehovah" or "Lord") as seen in the 2nd commandment: *You shall not misuse the name of the LORD (Yahweh) your God (Elohim).*^{Ex.20:7} The Jews did not mind writing and speaking of God (Elohim), but they would not utter the name "Yahweh" when reading the Scriptures, but substituted the word "Adonai" for it. They spoke of "the Elohim" - the true God as contrasted with false gods - but they never spoke or wrote of "the Yahweh" for there was only **one Yahweh** in heaven and earth. In Genesis we read of 'my God,' but never of 'my Yahweh; and 'the God of Israel,' but never of the 'Yahweh of Israel,' for there was only one Yahweh. *God says: I am the LORD (Yahweh); that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.*^{Is.42:8} We read of the *gods (elohim) of Egypt,*^{Ex.12:12} a Philistine idol named

Dagon was called a god: Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god (elohim) and to celebrate.^{Jdgs.16:23}

Within the “office” of God there are three distinct Persons – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are so united that they are called One and yet they each have their own distinct function. Listen, Israel: The LORD (Yahweh) is our God (elohim), the LORD (Yahweh) is one! You must love the LORD your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength.^{Dent.6:4-5} In creation we can clearly see the three distinct Persons yet each had a different role: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light.^{Gen.1:1-3} The Unity and distinctiveness of the Godhead is seen in other scriptures too: Then God said, Let us make man in our likeness.^{Gen.1:26} In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.^{Jn.1:1-2} The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the one and only Son. He came from the Father. And he was full of grace and truth.^{Jn.1:14} The Holy Spirit came down on [Jesus] in the form of a dove. A voice came from heaven. It said, “You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you.”^{Lk.3:22} But Jesus said, “You are from below. I am from heaven. You are from this world. I am not from this world.”^{Jn.8:23} I and the Father are one.^{Jn.10:30} Father, I pray that all of them will be one, just as you are in me and I am in you. I want them also to be in us. Then the world will believe that you have sent me.^{Jn.17:21}

Yes! The Holy Spirit is God – the 3rd person of the Trinity and has a Personality.

This is shown by the use of personal pronouns: Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.^{Jn.16:7-8} The Holy Spirit can speak, see, and hear,^{Acts 8:2} He can be grieved,^{Eph.4:30} He has a will^{1Cor.12:11} and He has all the attributes of the other Persons of the Godhead including being eternal,^{Heb.9:14} all powerful,^{Lk.1:35} and omnipresence by dwelling within every Believer.^{Jn.14:16-17}

So what does the Holy Spirit do?

The Holy Spirit convicts & converts sinners and empowers & equips saints!

He Convicts: Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would *convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.*^{Jn.16:8} Notice that this *convicting* is the Holy Spirit’s ministry to the world – not the Church: *When he comes, he’ll expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He’ll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted.*^{Jn.16:8-11}

The world has such a twisted view of God and His values that they are blind to who God really is but the Holy Spirit has come to reveal Jesus (who is the visible Person of the Godhead): *When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father - the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father - he will testify about me.*^{Jn.15:26} *No one has ever seen God. But God, the one and only Son, is at the Father’s side. He has shown us what God is like.*^{Jn.1:18}

He Converts: The Holy Spirit converts sinners: *Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’”*^{Jn.3:5-7}

He Empowers: Once we have been convicted of our sins and a need of a Saviour and have been *born of the Spirit*,^{Jn.3:8 (also Gal.4:29)} the Holy Spirit’s relationship with us changes because we are part of God’s family: *So you are no longer strangers and outsiders. You are citizens together with God’s people. You are members of God’s family.*^{Eph.2:19} The Holy Spirit now empowers us to be Jesus’ witnesses: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on*

you. Then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem. You will be my witnesses in all Judea and Samaria. And you will be my witnesses from one end of the earth to the other.^{Acts 1:8} God gave Israel the land: *the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity*^{Ps.37:11} but He gives Believers the earth: *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*^{Matt.5:5} There is nowhere on this earth that God has forbidden us to go therefore we are always in the right place at the right time to share something of God's Good News of a "*hope and a future.*"^{Jer.29:11} Jesus said: *God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.*^{Matt.28:18-20}

He Equips: We need to be strong and stable to be effective witnesses of Jesus and so the Holy Spirit equips us with all the strength and support that we need: *By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvellous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*^{2Pet.1:3-4}

In the OT, Abraham's servant was sent to fetch a bride for his son^{Gen.24} and gave Rebekah *silver and gold jewellery and clothing.*^{Gen.24:53} This is a "type" or picture of the Holy Spirit who was sent to prepare a bride for God's Son and who gives us gifts to equip and mature us: *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*^{Rev.21:2} *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" ...Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*^{Rev.22:17-20} *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, (literally eagerly desire to be spiritual) especially prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort... But the one who prophesies edifies the church. ...I would rather have you prophesy... so that the church may be edified.*^{1Cor.14:1-5}

So let's use the power and presents of the Holy Spirit. This not only honours Jesus but also makes our life blessed and a blessing.

April:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Phil.1:9

Sunday 6th April 2014 Ps.127. AGM

At the presentation of our Annual Report today, we thank God for the past year and ask His help for the coming year. But it will also be good to remind ourselves of what **Church** really is. The word **Church** is from the Greek *Ekklesia* meaning **a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place for the purpose of deliberating** (deliberating = discourse or debate with action taken after careful consideration). The **Church** is described as a **prepared Bride**^{Rev.19:7} and a **productive Branch**.^{Jn.15:4} It is also a **holy purpose-built Building**^{Eph.2:20-22} dedicated for **praise prayer and prophecy**^{Acts 15:16; 1Chrn.5-16;25:1} and a **place of provision**.^{Mal.3:10;Phil.4:19}

Our activities at Church are deliberate and motivated by our Vision and Values:

Our Church's Vision:

We proclaim Jesus, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present every-one perfect in Christ.^{Col.1:28}

To give every man, woman and child the opportunity of understanding the Gospel and provide a Church where they can grow and develop in ministry for the glory of God.

To fulfil this vision we are:

A Local Church with a World Vision: We meet locally for worship, prayer, Bible teaching and fellowship. We minister globally, reaching out to the world with the good news of Jesus Christ.

A Praying and Glorious Church: God intends that His wisdom is seen and His glory experienced in the Church. As we pray fervently and in faith, we see God perform miracles.

A Training Church: Our Church Services are planned to equip the congregation to live faithful lives and to prepare them for works of service. We encourage active participation in the corporate Praise, Worship, Prayer, Bible Reading and Ministry. Church is a life-boat not a pleasure-boat, we are called to be workers not spectators. We want all of God's people to be released to minister the Gospel.

A Sending Church: Our Church is a Mission Church and we send our Members out as Missionaries. A Missionary is not someone across the sea but someone who sees a cross! The mission field begins in our neighbourhood and extends to the nations.

Our Church's Values:

Love for Jesus: We have a relationship with, and dependence on, Jesus as the Son of God, for which we give thanks in unashamed private and public praise that reflects our appreciation of Him – His worth-ship!

Love for God's Word: The Scriptures point to Jesus^{Jn.5:39} and are reliable.^{Jn.10:35} They are an insight into God's character and values; a manual for right and blessed living.^{Ps.119:11} The Word of God really works in us who believe.^{1Thes.2:13}

Love for each other: Our relationship with others (which will be different for each of us) is expressed with affection and concern – we care for one another enough to pray for and help each other.

Love for the people of the world: We witness to others, through our conversation, behaviour and attitude, about God's glory, goodness and love. This witness is rooted in our indebtedness to God for His love and grace toward us.

Love for life – now and for ever: We realise that this life is a gateway to eternity and our response to God now determines what happens when we die. We have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing^{Eph.1:3} so we aim to be a blessing to others.^{Gen.12:2}

We are to be spiritually significant because we are sons of God: *Since you are God's children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and the Spirit cries out, "Father." So now you are not a slave; you are God's child, and God will give you the blessing he promised, because you are his child.*^{Gal.4:6-7} We should always be concerned about being **spiritually relevant** rather than socially relevant because we will always be at odds with the world: *Don't you know that to be a friend of the world is to hate God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Don't you know what Scripture says? The spirit that God caused to live in us wants us to belong only to God.*^{Jas.4:4-5} *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*^{Rom.12:2} In fact the world cannot understand us because it cannot understand God: *And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.*^{1Cor.2:12-14}

We are to be spiritually sound and synchronised with NT truth. The words of our songs and prayers must accurately reflect NT truth: *But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*^{Jn.4:23-24} Music should be singable (i.e. easy to participate in and enjoyable) and relevant to the words (i.e. enhance what is sung). Hymns and songs are used in an act of worship to God but they are only an aid to worship, not worship itself, and we sing them because they are good - not because they are new or old! *If you are born again, you are a son of God. And for you to tear yourself out of your sonship, your relationship and the righteousness of God and put yourself over in the reality of death and tell God you are dirty, unclean. that His blood has not cleansed you, and His life has not been delivered to you it is a monstrous thing. It is alright to sing that as an unregenerate but it is not the experience of the sons and daughters of God.*^{John G Lake} Church is about being clean: *Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word.*^{Eph.5:25-26}

We are to be spiritually sincere with no hypocrisy. Hype is for hypocrites who promote hysteria and try to manipulate people **but we encourage people to make a conscious and deliberate decision to willingly and cheerfully obey God – in faith!** *I give generously, cheerfully and willingly, knowing that You will make me rich in every way, so I can be generous on every occasion.*^{2Cor.9:6-11} *but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will.*^{Philemon 1:14} *Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.*^{2Cor.2:17} *And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for*

getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this: Our Father in heaven... ^{Matt.6:5-9}

Our conduct must reflect Jesus' character: For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. ^{1Pet.2:21-23} We should **NEVER** try to manipulate people or situations for our advantage. Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ^{1Pet.5:2-4} **We are Proclaimers not Performers.** Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. ^{Col.1:27-28}

Let's strive to continue to be spiritually significant, sound and sincere.

Sunday 13th April 2014. Ps.128. Matt.21.

Horses, Donkeys and Hinnies!

A hinny is a cross between and horse stallion and a donkey jenny and a mule is a cross between a donkey jack and horse mare. The OT rules forbad hybrids: *You must keep my statutes. You shall not cross-breed two different kinds of animals, you must not sow your field with two different kinds of seed, and you must not wear a garment mad e of two different kinds of fabric.* ^{Lev.19:19}

However this regulation wasn't strictly adhered to as mules are mentioned 5 times in the Bible: *They put Solomon on King David's mule.* ^{1Kgs.1:38} But the reason God forbad "mixtures" in agriculture and commerce is that "ceremonial holiness" meant more than mere separation – it signified that something was set apart in its proper position (just as Israel had to serve God as well as be separate from the other nations). We are saved **from** hell and saved **for** heaven so we too must ensure that we aren't just **different from the world** – **we must be the same as God** - and stay the same!

Happily for us, Jesus fulfilled the OT: *I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.* ^{Matt.5:17-18}

For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. ^{Rom.10:4} Those OT rules are now obsolete and don't apply today so we can wear clothes of mixed fabric and farm more efficiently: *When God speaks of a "new" covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete. It is now out of date and will soon disappear.* ^{Heb.8:13} However when it comes to Biblical symbolism, we shouldn't get horses and donkeys muddled up nor make them into a mixture!

Donkeys represent Peace. *Guide a horse with a whip, a donkey with a bridle, and a fool with a rod to his back!* ^{Prov.26:3} Horses are for war and need speed whereas donkeys are for work and can be less fleet: *Issachar is like a donkey lying down between two saddlebags. He sees how good his resting place is. He sees that his land is pleasant. So he'll carry a heavy load on his back. He will obey when he's forced to work.* ^{Gen.49:14-15} Prophets also rode on donkeys: *Then the prophet said to his sons, "Saddle a donkey for me." So they saddled a donkey.* ^{1Kgs.13:27} *Balaam got up, saddled his donkey.* ^{Nu.22:21}

Jesus came on a donkey ^{Matt.21} **but He will come on a horse;** ^{Rev.19:11} He came in **peace** ^{Lk.19:42; Jn.14:27} but He will come in **judgement;** ^{1Pet.4:5; Jude1:15} He came as a **Shepherd** (with a **Staff**) ^{Jn.10:14;Ps.23} but He will come as a **King** (with a **Sword**). ^{Rev.19:16}

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He came riding on a donkey to bring peace. Sadly the people did not understand: *As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes..."*^{Lk.19:41-42} They thought that He would **bring judgement** to the world and release them from Roman occupation, but **Jesus brought peace** to the world by passing judgement on the devil: *"The time for judging this world has come, when satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."* He said this to indicate how he was going to die.^{Jn.12:31-33} *"God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world. He sent his Son to save the world through him. Anyone who believes in him is not judged. But anyone who does not believe is judged already. He has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. "Here is the judgment. Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light. They loved darkness because what they did was evil."*^{Jn.3:17-19} *Christ himself is our peace... Through his body on the cross, Christ put an end to the law with all its commands and rules... He came and preached peace to you who were far away. He also preached peace to those who were near. Through Christ we both come to the Father by the power of one Holy Spirit.*^{Eph.2:14-18}

Yes Jesus came in peace and brought peace: *God made peace through Christ's blood, through his death on the cross. At one time you were separated from God. You were enemies in your minds because of your evil ways. But because Christ died, God has brought you back to himself. Christ's death has made you holy in God's sight without blemish and free from accusation - if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.*^{Col.1:20-23}

Horses represent War. *I will take care of my flock... I will make them like a proud horse in battle.*^{Zech.10:3} *You can prepare a horse for the day of battle. But the power to win comes from the LORD.*^{Pron.21:31} *Do you give the horse its strength or clothe its neck with a flowing mane? Do you make it leap like a locust, striking terror with its proud snorting? It paws fiercely, rejoicing in its strength, and charges into the fray. It laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; it does not shy away from the sword. The quiver rattles against its side, along with the flashing spear and lance. In frenzied excitement it eats up the ground; it cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds. At the blast of the trumpet it snorts, 'Aha!' It catches the scent of battle from afar, the shout of commanders and the battle cry.*^{Job.39:19-25} These characteristics of the horse are descriptive of Jesus: strength, majesty (flowing mane), overcomer (power to leap), authority (strikes fear by it's snorting) greater than all (afraid of nothing including opposition) etc.

Horses also represent honour or glory: *When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honour?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honour than me?" So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honour, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head."*^{Esther 6:6-8} **Jesus is worthy of all honour** because He is the Lamb and Lord: *Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels... In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"*^{Rev.5:11-13} Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.^{Phil.2:9-11}

When Jesus returns He is described as riding a horse to bring Judgement for all those who have rejected Him and His rule: *I looked, and there in front of me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow in his hands. He was given a crown. He rode out like a hero on his way to victory.*^{Rev.6:2} *I saw heaven standing open. There in front of me was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True. When he judges or makes war, he is always fair. His eyes are like blazing fire. On his head are*

many crowns. A name is written on him that only he knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood. His name is The Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses. They were dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of the rider's mouth comes a sharp sword. He will strike down the nations with it. Scripture says, "He will rule them with an iron rod."^(Ps 2:9) He stomps on the grapes of God's winepress. The winepress stands for the terrible anger of the God who rules over all. Here is the name that is written on the rider's robe and on his thigh. **THE GREATEST KING OF ALL AND THE MOST POWERFUL LORD OF ALL.**^{Rev.19:11-16}

We are still in the day of Grace where there is time to repent and get right with God: *We belong to Christ if we hold firmly to the faith we had at first. But we must hold to it until the end. It has just been said, "Listen to his voice today. If you hear it, don't be stubborn."^{Heb.3:14} In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.^{2Tim.4:1-2} We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other... This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.^{1Jn.3:14-16}*

Let's make sure we recognise the difference between Jesus on a donkey coming in peace and Jesus on a horse coming for judgement and there are no HYBRIDS! *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.^{Rom.5:1-2}*

Sunday 20th April 2014. Ps.24 Jn.20 Matt.21. Easter Sunday

Peace be to you!

Peace is the characteristic of the kingdom of the Prince of Peace: *And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.^{Is.9:6-7} Jesus came to bring peace to the world by dying on the cross. Christ himself is our peace... Through his body on the cross, Christ put an end to the law with all its commands and rules... He came and preached peace to you who were far away. He also preached peace to those who were near. Through Christ we both come to the Father by the power of one Holy Spirit.^{Eph.2:14-18} **When Jesus died, He defeated the devil and destroyed his work:** The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.^{1Jn.3:8} Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.^{Heb.2:14-15} Because we are living after Jesus died and rose again, we can enjoy the benefits of His work including **PEACE** – peace with God and peace with ourselves – a clear conscience: Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said.^{Jn.20:19} Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.^{Heb.10:22-23} keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.^{1Tim.3:9}*

This peace is not the absence of trouble or freedom from difficulties **but rather a rest in the midst of our difficulties:** *I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.^{Jn.16:33} The LORD had given him peace and rest from all of his enemies who were around him.^{2Sam.7:1} Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.^{Ps.23:4} And this peace does not come from prayer or going to church or even helping the poor but from knowing God and Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.^{2Pet.1:2}*

Isaiah describes some of the reasons and benefits of this peace.

Peace is the result of being right with God: *The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest. Though hail flattens the forest and the city is levelled completely, how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free.*^{Is.32:17-20}

Peace is the result of obedience to God: *The LORD and King is the Holy One of Israel. He says, "You will find peace and rest when you turn away from your sins and depend on me. You will receive the strength you need when you stay calm and trust in me."*^{Is.30:15} *Oh, that you had listened to my commands! Then you would have had peace flowing like a gentle river and righteousness rolling over you like waves in the sea.*^{Is.48:18}

Peace is the result of acknowledging God's care and provision: *LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.*^{Is.26:12}

Peace is the result of fixing our thoughts on God: *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you (all whose thoughts are fixed on you!).*^{Is.26:3}

Contrast this with someone who is unstable: *be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.*^{Jas.1:6-8}

God has promised peace regardless of circumstances: *Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*^{Is.54:10}

The laws of physics work whether you believe them or not (like gravity, electricity, seasons of moon and sun etc.) but it is essential that we have a working knowledge of them if we are to utilise the benefits of those laws. Theology by itself is just theory and is of little practical use until it is put to work. **God's Word is true whether we believe it or not, but faith is the application of God's Word:**

humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.^{Jas.1:212-25} *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.*^{1Thes.2:13}

Faith does not resist God and neither does it put any obstacle in the way. Faith is acting on God's Word in simple trust with quiet contentment and confidence. *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.*^{1Tim.6:6-7}

When Jesus died, He made *peace through his blood, shed on the cross*^{Col.1:20} but the theology of "forgiveness" – peace - would have remained just a theory for us (as it does for many people today) if Jesus had not been raised from the dead: *And if Christ has not been raised, what we preach doesn't mean anything. Your faith doesn't mean anything either. More than that, we would be lying about God. We have given witness that God raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if the dead are not raised. If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith doesn't mean anything. Your sins have not been forgiven. Those who have died believing in Christ are also lost. Do we have hope in Christ only for this life? Then people should pity us more than anyone else.*^{1Cor.15:14-20}

But because Jesus has been raised, we know that we too will be raised: *But Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise. Death came because of what a man did. Rising from the dead also comes because of what a man did. Because of Adam, all people die. So because of Christ, all will be made*

alive.^{1Cor.15:20-22} This is what Simeon prophesied to Mary: *He said to Mary, Jesus' mother, "This child is going to cause many people in Israel to fall and to rise (anastasis - a standing up, i.e. a resurrection). God has sent him. But many will speak against him."*^{Lk.2:34}

Jesus' resurrection changed everything and because Jesus is a Priest in a new order, God changed the Law (rules): *You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*^{Heb.7:17} (For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.)^{Heb.7:12}

This new Order is the New Covenant where sins are forgiven: *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*^{Matt.26:28} No wonder Jesus said: **Peace be to you!** And He is still saying *Peace; Shalom (blessing, happiness, contentment, well-being, prosperity); Fear not; Don't be afraid.*

Now we have peace with God, a righteous spirit^{1Pet.1:23} and a sound (saved) mind,^{Tit.2:6;2Tim.1:6} we can expect a blessed life: *Dear friend, I hope all is well with you and that you are as healthy in body as you are strong in spirit.*^{3Jn.1:2}

But when trouble comes – either sickness, persecutions or accidents, **we will still be at peace with God and praise Him because we know our sins are forgiven:** *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*^{Ps.42:11} *"I was born naked. And I'll leave here naked. You have given, and you have taken away. May your name be praised."* In spite of everything, Job didn't sin by blaming God for doing anything wrong.^{Job.1:21-22}

Easter, like Christmas, began in the heart of God and is only complete when it reaches the heart of man: *Glory to the new-born King, Born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.* Don't wait until next Easter to think about the Resurrection – it was the reason Jesus came and it is the good news that we celebrate each day of our life – **peace with God:** *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.*^{2Tim.2:8}

Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.^{1Thes.5:23-24}

Sunday 27th April 2014. Ps.130 Jn.21.

Important Numbers

The Bible often uses stories and illustrations to symbolize the spiritual truth that is being conveyed. These "symbols" are *silhouettes* (i.e. something that looks similar but is only a two dimensional dark copy): *All those things are mere shadows cast before what was to come; the substance is Christ.*^{Col.2:17} *The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming. It is not the real things themselves.*^{Heb.10:1}

There is a pattern of symbols running through the Bible but we must be careful not to see hidden codes that are not there. The Bible is a collection of 66 books written over a span of at least 1,600 years (approximately 1500 BC to AD 100), by more than 40 kings, prophets, leaders and followers of Jesus. The Bible is meant to be simple and easy to understand by uneducated and educated alike because it is God's plan of redemption revealed through Jesus.

The *Gnostics* (meaning *learned*) had begun to influence the early church and they mixed philosophy, metaphysics, curiosity, culture, knowledge, and the secrets of history and the universe. They taught that to be saved you had to know God by receiving "secret knowledge" or "enlightenment" which could only be reached by practicing philanthropy to the point of personal poverty, abstinence and diligently searching for wisdom by helping others. Paul confronted the gnostic influence: *Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.*^{1Tim.6:20-21}

However there is a fairly consistent use of symbols in the Bible and they are used redemptively to illustrate spiritual truths especially the OT rituals and some of the

prophecies. (But they are not absolutely consistent so we must be careful not to read something into a text that is not intended.)

For instance

1 = Absolute: *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.*^{1Tim.2:5-6}

2 = unity: *a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. The two will become one.*^{Eph.2:31}

3 = ultimate: “holy, holy, holy” the Trinity and the 3rd day is the day of Resurrection

4 = earth: we have the 4 seasons, the 4 corners of the earth and the 4 living creatures around the throne of God.

5 = grace:

6 = sin/man: -the number of man because man was created on the 6th day. Six days are appointed for man to work.

7 = complete: the number of completeness in the old created order, (4+3=7). *Seven occurs 54 times in Revelation*

8 = the number of new beginnings: Jesus rose from the dead on the 8th day.

10 = human government: “Ten kings” - the number of worldly completion (4+6=10). Ten virgins total. Ten toes on the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream,^{Dan.2} ten horns on the beast.^{Rev.17:2}

12 = redemption: the number of eternal perfection as in the 12 Tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the church. There are 12 gates to New Jerusalem, its walls measure 12 x 12 cubits high and the sides are 12,000 furlongs in length.

13 = evil:

40 = the number of testing: Jesus was tempted in the wilderness 40 days and nights. Israel wandered in the wilderness 40 years. During the flood, the rain fell 40 days and nights.

666 = the numerical value of “Caesar Nero”. Six hundred and sixty six, **not** six, six, six.

1,000 = large number: (when linked with years = long time) equates to “**the Kingdom of God**”.

144,000 = 12 x 12,000 many redeemed: 12 x 1,000 from each of the 12 tribes (the redeemed)

So what is the significance of 153? *Simon Peter climbed into the boat. He dragged the net to shore. It was full of large fish. There were 153 of them. But even with that many fish the net was not torn.*^{Jn.21:11}

There is none – only that someone had counted the fish and so this was an eyewitness account!! God was ensuring that there was enough evidence of the basic tenets of true faith to ensure that those of us who are born after those events would never have to question the validity of our faith. *I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.*^{1Cor.15:3-4} The uniqueness of Christianity is not the fact of God’s holiness or man’s sinfulness or even God coming to earth but that Jesus became human, died for our sins and rose from the dead, thus giving proof of God’s forgiveness.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not just an historical fact though – **the resurrection of Jesus is the reason we have been saved from our sins.** As we saw last week: *if Christ has not been raised, what we preach doesn't mean anything. Your faith doesn't mean anything either. More than that, we would be lying about God. We have given witness that God raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if the dead are not raised. If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith doesn't mean anything. Your sins have not been forgiven. Those who have died believing in Christ are also lost.*

Do we have hope in Christ only for this life? Then people should pity us more than anyone else. But Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise. Death came because of what a man did. Rising from the dead also comes because of what a man did. Because of Adam, all people die. So because of Christ, all will be made alive.^{1Cor.15:14-22}

Because Jesus was seen by so many different people at different times^{1Cor.15:5-8} and because of the great change in their lives after they met Jesus, His resurrection is clearly not just an academic fact or an emotional experience. Jesus' resurrection is a spiritual truth which can lead to a spiritual experience that will affect every part of your life. It will change you from being fearful to bold and from an opponent to a proponent: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us... And that's not all. We have the Holy Spirit as the promise of future blessing. But we also groan inside ourselves as we look forward to the time when God will adopt us as full members of his family. Then he will give us everything he has for us. He will raise our bodies and give glory to them.*^{Rom.8:18-23} It will change you from being a coward to being courageous even to the point of becoming a martyr. *The time will come when people won't put up with true teaching... They will turn to stories that aren't completely true... Work to spread the good news. Do everything God has given you to do... The time has come for me to leave. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is a crown waiting for me. It is given to those who are right with God. The Lord, who judges fairly, will give it to me on the day he returns. He will not give it only to me. He will also give it to all those who are longing for him to return.*^{2Tim.4:3-8}

Those 153 big fish were the turning point for Peter. When Jesus said “*Simon, son of John, do you really love me more than these others do?*”^{Jn.21:15} Peter replied “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*”^{Jn.21:16} Jesus then told Peter to feed and care for His sheep. Wisdom is applied knowledge and until we act on the facts they remain just words. Christianity is about loving Jesus but this love is practical as well as personal. It involves encouraging, exhorting and edifying others (like prophesy): *But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.*^{1Cor.14:3} Every one of us who has had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus is commissioned (like Peter) to *feed His sheep*, regardless of how many sheep there are! When Jesus said, “*Take care of my sheep*”^{Jn.21:16} He was saying “*shepherd my sheep*” or “*act like a shepherd to my sheep*”. The Bible exhorts us to *be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.*^{Pron.27:23} David was described as shepherding the people *with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them.*^{Ps.78:72}

Numbers are important but there are no hidden codes in the Bible, just plain facts for everyone to read! So let's make sure we *love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind*^{Matt.22:37} and *strengthen, encourage and comfort others* with sound spiritual food.

Let's use sound spiritual wisdom and not be affected by superstitions or myths: *Command them not to spend their time on stories that aren't completely true. They must not waste time on family histories that never end. Things like that cause people to argue instead of doing God's work. His work is done by faith. Love is the purpose of my command. Love comes from a pure heart. It comes from a good sense of what is right and wrong. It comes from faith that is honest and true. Some have wandered away from those teachings. They would rather talk about things that have no meaning. They want to be teachers of the law. And they are very sure about that law. But they don't know what they are talking about.... True teaching agrees with the glorious good news of the blessed God. He trusted me with that good news.*^{1Ti.1:4-11}

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead... This is my gospel.^{2Tim.2:8}

May:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Phil.4:6

Sunday 4th May Ps.131

What do you think is the greatest thing you have ever done?

Greatness is often seen as “*success*” (with all the fame, fortune and fun that is supposed to come with it). However, success is not always “*great*” or even significant. Paul the Apostle was “*successful*” before he became a Christian – he had social status, education, reputation, religious zeal, political influence and lacked for nothing.^{Phil.3:1-4} But when he became a Christian he saw that this “*success*” was irrelevant because it was only a matter of “*stuff*” and people’s opinion. *I thought things like that were for my benefit. But now I consider them to be nothing because of Christ. Even more, I consider everything to be nothing compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. To know him is the best thing of all. Because of him I have lost everything. But I consider all of it to be garbage so I can get to know Christ. I want to be joined to him. For me, being right with God does not come from the law. It comes because I believe in Christ. It comes from God. It is received by faith. I want to know Christ better. I want to know the power that raised him from the dead. I want to share in his sufferings. I want to become like him by sharing in his death. Then by God's grace I will rise from the dead.*^{Phil.3:7-11}

Jesus emphasised that our real life prioritises the spiritual not the physical: *Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*^{Lk.12:15} *Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.*^{Matt.6:19-21} *That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? ...These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.*^{Matt.6:25-34}

We should strive to be the best in everything that we do because our whole life is dedicated to serving God:

On that day even the harness bells of the horses will be inscribed with these words: HOLY TO THE LORD.^{Zech.14:20} *And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father... Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.*^{Col.3:17;23-24} *Character is greater than charisma and, faithfulness is greater than fame or fortune. In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with goodness; knowledge; self-control; perseverance; godliness; mutual affection; and love... The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop in this way are short-sighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.*^{2Pet.1:5-9}

As Believers we are much more significant than we often realise. We are important: *I tell you, no one more important than John has ever been born. But the least important person in God's kingdom is more important than he is.*^{Lk.7:28} However, not everyone appreciates us: *But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-*

like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this?^{2Cor.2:14-16}

As we saw last week, every one of us who has had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus is commissioned (like Peter) to feed Jesus' sheep, regardless of how many sheep there are! When Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep"^{Jn.21:16} He was saying "shepherd my sheep" or "act like a shepherd to my sheep" and we are to do this *with integrity of heart; with skilful hands.*^{Ps.78:72} This means that we are all leaders and so we must act like leaders because others watching and imitating us: *This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: In those days ten men from different nations and languages of the world will clutch at the sleeve of one Jew. And they will say, 'Please let us walk with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'*^{Zech.8:23} Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.^{Heb.13:7}

God keeps a record of our conversations about Him: *Those who had respect for the LORD talked with one another. They cheered each other up. And the LORD heard them. A list of people and what they did was written on a scroll in front of him. It included the names of those who respected the LORD and honoured him. "They will belong to me," says the LORD who rules over all. "They will be my special treasure. I will spare them just as a loving father spares his son who serves him. Then once again you will see the difference between godly people and sinful people. And you will see the difference between those who serve me and those who do not.*^{Mal.3:16-18}

The greatest thing we can ever do is to know Jesus Christ: **I want to know Christ better. I want to know the power that raised him from the dead... and so attain to the resurrection from the dead,**^{Phil.3:11} **because to know Jesus is eternal life.**^{Jn.17:3}

And after we know Jesus, the next greatest thing is to introduce someone else to Him: *My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.*^{Jas.5:19-20} We may not be the "best" or the "greatest" by the world's standards but we are called by God and are empowered by Him to be better than the world's standards:

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD."^{1Cor.1:26-31}

Yes - *The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away*^{Is.50:4-5} —so let's "fulfil Scripture" and use those words to bless others. *God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*^{Heb.6:10-12}

Sunday 11th May 2014. Is.12:1-6

As I am away today, I have included an article by Greg Koukl from www.str.org

A Principle for Conversational Prayer *adapted from Greg Koukl (www.str.org)*

When we meet for prayer, we should pray according to the acronym SIT: specifically, intelligibly, and thankfully.

Here is the key observation that has helped improve my own prayer life: **Prayer is harder when it is rambling. It is harder for the person praying, and it is harder for those listening when prayer is in a group.**

One of my frustrations when praying with others is that Christians often don't pray intelligibly. We tell young Christians who are unaccustomed to prayer to simply talk normally when speaking to God. "*Prayer is conversation,*" we say. And it is. That is what we tell them, but that is not what we do when we pray with them. When it comes to God, our normal way of speaking often goes out the window. We lace our prayers with contrived Christian mumbo jumbo (some have called it "*Christian psycho-babble*"). We insert useless words like "*just*" in virtually every phrase. Then we use the words "*Lord,*" "*Father,*" and "*Jesus*" as if they were punctuation marks! In short, we talk to God in ways we wouldn't think of talking when speaking with any other intelligent person.

This habit is hard to break. I know from personal experience. But I have a solution that has helped me trim down the nonsense:— **pray according to the acronym SIT: specifically, intelligibly and thankfully.** These are the things you would normally - and quite naturally - if you were speaking to someone of importance making request for help or provision. You'd explain your need, why you need it, and why your request should be granted. I think we should do the same with God. We should pray in full sentences, intelligibly, with complete thoughts. Our prayers should include clear, specific requests, and straightforward, genuine expressions of feeling and thanks. Some people find that occasionally writing their prayers out is helpful. It forces them to put more clarity and substance into their prayers. *There is one thing we can be sure of when we come to God in prayer. If we ask anything in keeping with what he wants, he hears us.*^{1Jn.5:14}

Apply the SIT principle to your own prayer life. Train yourself to pray specifically, intelligibly, and thankfully. Second, instruct those in your spiritual charge how to pray "*conversationally.*" Then model it for them when you pray together. There is no need to be pious, just clear and genuine. In this way, you will be helping yourself and also those around you. **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**^{Phil.4:6}

What if Jesus Meant What He Said? *It isn't the poor who Jesus commends on the Sermon on the Mount (and elsewhere), but rather the poor in Spirit, not the poverty stricken, but the morally broken.* Sometimes, knowing what Jesus did not come to do is almost as important as knowing what He did come to do because a wrong understanding of the first can lead to confusion on the second.

Two groups seem to go astray here. The first are non-Christians enamoured with Jesus for what they take to be His emphasis on the Golden Rule, love for one's neighbour, concern for the poor and the outcast, and "*tolerance*" (the latter understood as accepting all and judging none)—broadly what has come to be called "**social justice.**" The second group are Christians who, focusing on the "**red letter**" sections of the Gospels—the actual words of Jesus often rendered in red so they stand out—come to the same conclusion as the first group, on the main. These believers ask, "*What if Jesus meant what He said?*" in discourses like the Sermon on the Mount. Again, **social justice.** For those tempted to summarize Jesus this way, consider for a moment the final record of Jesus' life—the last testament of His purpose and mission—written by one of Jesus' intimate inner circle, the "*beloved*" disciple John.

Surprisingly, from John 1:1 to John 21:25 **there is not a single verse that advances the cause of social justice.** Not one. Jesus' only mention of the poor is this—*The poor you always have with you.*^{Jn.12:8} Check any major discourse of Jesus—the *Sermon on the Mount*,^{Mat.5-7} the *Bread of Life Discourse*,^{Jn.6} the *Olivet Discourse*,^{Mat.24;Lk.21;Mk.13} or the *Upper Room Discourse*^{Jn.13-17}—and you will search in vain for emphasis on the social gospel. **Why?** Indeed, check any Gospel. Yes, occasionally you will find a mention of the poor, but almost always when Jesus is making a point about something else—*hypocrisy*,^{Mat.6:2-3} a *widow's generosity*,^{Lk.21:2-3} *Zaccheus' repentance*,^{Lk.19:8} the *rich young ruler's confusion*,^{Mat.19:21} or a *lesson about the afterlife*.^{Lk.16:20-22} **Why? Because proclaiming social justice was not Jesus' mission.** Jesus' discourses focus on something else. **The Gospels focus on something else. The Epistles focus on something else.** Not on the works of Christians, **but rather on the work of Christ.** It isn't the poor who Jesus commends on the Sermon on the Mount (and elsewhere), but rather the **poor in Spirit**, not the poverty stricken, but the **morally broken.**

Picture the tax collector Jesus tells about—hardly destitute—beating his breast pleading, *God be merciful to me, the sinner.*^{Lk.18:9-14} This man proclaiming his **spiritual poverty** went away **justified** while the Pharisee, whose spiritual arrogance clouded his genuine spiritual need, did not. The main divide for Jesus was not between the poor and the rich, but between the **proud and the repentant.** In His own words: *I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*^{Lk.6:32} *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*^{Mat.20:28} *The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*^{Lk.19:10}

I point this out not to deemphasize our obligation to the poor because certainly the Bible teaches us to be compassionate and help those in material need. I point this out **to emphasize the centrality of the Gospel.** Did Jesus care about the poor and downtrodden? **Of course He did. He also cared about the rich and powerful.** Jesus helped everyone and anyone who came to Him—poor beggar or prostitute, wealthy tax collector or Pharisee.

“Social justice”—a.k.a. the “social gospel”—is not the Gospel and it was not Jesus' message. It is not why He came. **His real message was much more radical.** *“What if Jesus meant what He said?”* Indeed. That's my question, too. So many confusing messages and well-meaning, yet unbiblical viewpoints find their way to the forefront of our society. But we continue to dedicate ourselves to ensuring you and others live and act in light of the true Gospel of Christ.

Sunday 18th May 2014. Ps.2. Acts 1

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.^{Acts 1:11}

We are Foursquare Gospel people who proclaim Jesus Christ as the Coming King as well as Saviour, Baptizer, and Healer. This is not escapism where we focus on the “*sweet by and by*” hoping that everything will turn out alright in the end but it is a declaration of the wonderful liberating truth that **Jesus is Lord** – that He is in control and will return to judge both the living and the dead. This gives us hope when life is hard or circumstances are tough. We can laugh at our difficulties because God laughs: *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain... He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision... [He says] I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.*^{Ps.2:1-5} To equate our hope with escape from a doomed world is pathetic theology and an insult to Scriptural integrity.

Our hope is Jesus Christ Himself and our eternal relationship with Him. **We have hope now not just in the future!** Jesus is Lord and has introduced the Kingdom that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream: *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom. It will never be destroyed. And no other nation will ever take it over. It will crush all of those other kingdoms. It will bring them to an end. But it will last forever. That's what the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain means. Human hands didn't cut the rock out. It broke the statue to pieces...* *The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.*^{Dan.2:44-46}

The Coming King. When Jesus returns it will be Physical, Public and Powerful.

Jesus' Return will be Physical: Some teach that Jesus will come back spiritually and so you may not notice His return but the angels said that Jesus will come back in *exactly the same way as the Disciples watched Him go into heaven.*^{Acts 1:11} Jesus had a physical body when He rose from the dead: *they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."* *And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.*^{Lk.24:37-40} **Yes, Jesus ascended physically to heaven and He will return physically to this earth.**

Jesus' Return will be Public: Everyone will see Jesus when He returns: *Look! He is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him. Even those who pierced him will see him. All the nations of the earth will be sad because of him. This will really happen! Amen.*^{Rev.1:7} Jesus will return with a loud shout and a trumpet call: *When the Lord comes, many of us will still be alive. We tell you that we will certainly not go up before those who have died. The Lord himself will come down from heaven. We will hear a loud command. We will hear the voice of the leader of the angels. We will hear a blast from God's trumpet. Many who believe in Christ will have died already. They will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them. We will be taken up in the clouds. We will meet the Lord in the air. And we will be with him forever. So cheer each other up with these words of comfort.*^{1Thes.4:15-18} **Yes Jesus ascended publicly to heaven and He will return publicly to this earth.**

Jesus' Return will be Powerful: Jesus ascended to heaven in power and gave power and authority to be His Witnesses – the Disciples were changed from bashful to bold, from coward to courageous. When Jesus returns it will be with power and authority to save those who are waiting for Him and to serve notice on those who have ignored Him: *People have to die once. After that, God will judge them. In the same way, Christ was offered up once. He took away the sins of many people. He will also come a second time. At that time he will not suffer for sin. Instead, he will come to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*^{Heb.9:27-2} *I saw heaven standing open. There in front of me was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True. When he judges or makes war, he is always fair. His eyes are like blazing fire. On his head are many crowns. A name is written on him that only he knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood. His name is The Word of God... Here is the name that is written on the rider's robe and on his thigh. THE GREATEST KING OF ALL AND THE MOST POWERFUL LORD OF ALL.*^{Rev.19:11-16} He is coming to judge the world: *Look! The Lord is coming with thousands and thousands of his holy ones. He is coming to judge everyone. He is coming to sentence all ungodly people. He will judge them for all the ungodly acts they have done. They have done them in ungodly ways. He will sentence ungodly sinners for all the bad things they have said about him.*^{Jude 1:14-15} **Yes Jesus ascended powerfully to heaven and He will return powerfully to this earth.**

Time is short and the reason Jesus hasn't returned yet is because He wants more people to be saved: *But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a*

thief.^{2Pet.3:8-10} Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.^{Acts3:19-21} Although not everyone will be saved, everyone deserves the right to know about the Kingdom of God – that is our Commission: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*^{Matt.28:18-20} As we the Church extend the influence of God's Kingdom throughout the whole world there will be a corresponding opposition but although we are surrounded by enemies we are not overcome by them! Therefore, we the church should not shrink back from advancing the honour of God in our society! Neither should we allow *evangelists for ungodliness*, often found in positions of great influence within our society (especially the Media, Politics and other Public Offices), to be the sole voice of direction in our societies! No! We are meant to be salt and light: *You are the salt of the earth. But suppose the salt loses its saltiness. How can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything. It will be thrown out. People will walk all over it.*^{Matt.5:13}

Therefore, this is what I would like us to do –

- 1. Live life well.** Holiness, integrity, purity and Christlikeness are more than virtues – **they are essential qualities of a Christian:** *Try your best to live in peace with everyone. Try to be holy. Without holiness no one will see the Lord.*^{1Heb.12:14}
 - 2. Love your church.** *Get rid of all hard feelings, anger and rage. Stop all fighting and lying. Put away every form of hatred. Be kind and tender to one another. Forgive each other, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.*^{Eph.4:31-32}
 - 3. Be content.** *So put to death anything that belongs to your earthly nature. Get rid of your sexual sins and unclean acts. Don't let your feelings get out of control. Remove from your life all evil longings. Stop always wanting more and more. You might as well be worshipping statues of gods. God's anger is going to come because of those things. That's the way you lived at one time in your life. But now here are the kinds of things you must get rid of. You must put away anger, rage, hate and lies. Let no dirty words come out of your mouths. Don't lie to each other. You have gotten rid of your old way of life and its habits. You have started living a new life. It is being made new so that what you know has the Creator's likeness.*^{Col. 3:5-10}
 - 4. Use your gifts.** *We all have gifts. They differ in keeping with the grace that God has given each of us. Do you have the gift of prophecy? Then use it in keeping with the faith you have. Is it your gift to serve? Then serve. Is it teaching? Then teach. Is it telling others how they should live? Then tell them. Is it giving to those who are in need? Then give freely. Is it being a leader? Then work hard at it. Is it showing mercy? Then do it cheerfully.*^{Rom.12:6-8}
 - 5. Engage hearts and minds.** *Salt is good. But suppose it loses its saltiness. How can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves. And be at peace with each other.*^{Mk.9:50}
- Remember: We have hope now not just in the future! This hope is Jesus Christ Himself and our eternal relationship with Him.** *But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. Yet do it with courtesy and respect, keeping a good conscience, so that those who slander your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame when they accuse you.*^{1Pet.3:15-16}

Sunday 25th May 2014 Ps.132 Acts 2

Remember your Roots: *Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.*^{Is.51:1}

The Church was birthed in noise and activity but it although it looked chaotic there was a holy order in it – **praise and reverence for the Risen, Ascended and Glorified Jesus**. The Christians of the early Church were not concerned about being “relevant” or “sensitive” to their community because they were so overwhelmed by the Resurrection of Jesus and His gift of the Holy Spirit. In fact they were described as “drunk with wine.”^{Acts 2:13} Jeremiah had a similar experience when he saw the way people mistreated God’s Word. *My heart is broken inside me. All of my bones tremble with fear. I am like a man who is drunk. I am like someone who has had too much wine. That’s what the LORD’s holy words have done to me. The land is full of people who aren’t faithful to the LORD.*^{Jer. 23:9-10}

As we revisit the beginning of the Church which was at the Jewish Feast of Pentecost (the beginning of the main harvest,^{Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:15f}) we see the pattern that God set for rest of the Church’s life: **The Holy Spirit comes with Force, with Fire and to Fill.**

Force: *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house.*^{Acts 2:2} When Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit we are transformed from bashful to bold because He empowers us to talk about Him. *When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and discovered that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized these men had been with Jesus.*^{Acts 4:13} **God’s Word (who is Jesus) strengthens and emboldens us:**

Every word you give me is a miracle word—how could I help but obey?^{Psa. 119:129} *Invigorate my soul so I can praise you well, use your decrees to put iron in my soul.*^{Psa. 119:175} It makes no difference what our background is, or even what our natural ability is, because **God has now made His home with us** – His Name is **Emmanuel**.^{Matt. 1:23} *Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*^{Rev. 21:3} Although this is still to be fulfilled completely, (when death is no more^{Rev. 21:4}) Jesus said that God will dwell with us now: *Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love him. We will come to him and make our home with him.*^{Jn. 14:23} So we should always think, speak and act as Believers in whom God dwells: *You made me bold and stouthearted.*^{Psa. 138:3} *Strengthen the hands of those who are weak. Help those whose knees give way. Say to those whose hearts are afraid, “Be strong. Do not fear. Your God will come. He will pay your enemies back. He will come to save you.”*^{Psa. 35:3-4}

Fire: *They saw something that looked like tongues of fire. The flames separated and settled on each of them.*^{Acts 2:3} [Jesus] *will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*^{Lk. 3:16} **Fire is used to symbolize refining or purifying:** *I will put [them] into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’*^{Zech. 13:9} When Daniel warns of coming perils, he also encourages us to see trouble as experience that will refine us: *He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant, but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. And the wise among the people shall make many understand, though for some days they shall stumble by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder. When they stumble, they shall receive a little help. And many shall join themselves to them with flattery, and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.*^{Dan. 11:32-35}

The Holy Spirit’s fire (i.e. His involvement in our life, especially in difficult times), is refining our faith: *So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.*^{1Pet. 1:6-9}

Fill: *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak...*^{Acts 2:4} The Church began with a great eruption of audible praise and a sermon because the Believers were filled right up to overflowing! *“If anyone believes in me, rivers of living water will flow out from that person's heart, as the Scripture says.”* Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been raised to glory. But later, those who believed in Jesus would receive the Spirit.^{In. 7:38-39} It is written, *“I believed, and so I have spoken.”*^{Ps 116:1} *With that same spirit of faith we also believe. And we also speak.*^{2Cor. 4:13}

The Church's ministry is still the same – to express love of God in praise & thanksgiving and to tell others of God's goodness & honour. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we will praise and preach with a passion and excitement that overwhelms our natural reserve!

Jesus said we should **ASK – Ask, Seek and Knock for the Holy Spirit**, confident that God will never give a counterfeit gift: *So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*^{Lk. 11:9-13}

At the Church's birth the Believers praised in “tongues” and preached in their usual language. Although our native language is inadequate to express our appreciation of God's greatness and goodness, if we are to share God's love with others credibly, we must use our mind and a known language, to communicate our message in a way that others can understand!

Let's remember our roots and ask God for the Force, Fire and Filling of the Holy Spirit as it was at the beginning. This is our spiritual DNA and the very essence of our spiritual life so don't lose it.

Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who overcomes I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.^{Rev. 2:7}

June:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people. Col.1:3-4

Sunday 1st June 2014 Ps.133

Let's learn from animals – but live like kings!

Wisdom is the most valuable thing we can get: *Get wisdom. Get understanding. Don't forget my words. Don't turn away from them. Stay close to wisdom, and she will keep you safe. Love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is best. So get wisdom. No matter what it costs, get understanding. Value wisdom, and she will lift you up. Hold her close, and she will honour you. She will set a beautiful crown on your head. She will give you a glorious crown.*^{Pron.4:6-9}

Wisdom is applying the knowledge we have – using the basic facts to our advantage. Being **Wise** means being: **Astute, Discerning, Judicious, Perceptive, Prudent, Sagacious, Sensible, Shrewd.** *It is much better to get wisdom than gold. It is much better to choose understanding than silver.*^{Pron.16:16}

However, there is a spiritual dimension to wisdom – Jesus Christ: *Because of what God has done, you belong to Christ Jesus. He has become God's wisdom for us. He makes us right with God. He makes us holy and sets us free.*^{1Cor.1:30} God's Wisdom (personified in Jesus) elevates Believers above the mundaneness of everyday life into a completely different dimension: *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ... We have been set free because of what Christ has done. Through his blood our sins have been forgiven. We have been set free because God's grace is so rich. He poured his grace on us by giving us great wisdom and understanding.*^{Eph.1:3-8}

Nature is full of readily available examples to illustrate life lessons for us:

Four things on earth are small. But they are very wise. The first are ants. They aren't very strong. But they store up their food in the summer. The second are rock badgers. They aren't very powerful. But they make their home among the rocks. The third are locusts. They don't have a king. But they all march forward in ranks. And the fourth are lizards. Your hand can catch them. But you will find them in kings' palaces. Three things walk with stately stride. Four things move as kings do. The first is a lion. It is mighty among the animals. It doesn't back away from anything. The second is a cockerel that walks proudly. The third is a billy-goat. And the fourth is a king who has his army around him. Have you been foolish? Have you thought you were better than others? Have you planned evil? If you have, put your hand over your mouth and stop talking! If you churn cream, you will produce butter. If you twist a nose, you will produce blood. And if you stir up anger, you will produce a fight.^{Pron.30:24-33}

Four things that are small but wise.

Ants: Their wisdom is that they prepare for the future (even though they are not strong). We only live once and then we must give an account to God face-to-face –if we are not prepared we are fools. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.*^{2Cor.5:9-11}

Hyaxes (Rock badgers): Their wisdom is that they have a place of refuge (even though they are not powerful). We need to live in a secure Refuge to avoid the real disaster of eternal loss and suffering. *So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.*^{Heb.6:18-19}

Locusts: Their wisdom is that they live in order and cooperation (even though they don't have a king). We need to take our place in the Body of Christ with each of us using our gifts and talents. *You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it... But God has joined together all the parts of the body. And he has given more honour to the parts that didn't have any. In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. All of them will take care of each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honoured, every part shares in its joy.*^{1Cor.12:24-27} *You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.*^{Matt.5:9}

Lizards: Their wisdom is that they get into the most significant places (even though they are the humblest of creatures). We each need to “get into the most significant place” – **the Throne of God:** *So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*^{Heb.4:16} *Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honour at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.*^{Col.3:1-4}

Four things that walk with stately stride

Lions: Be Bold. *This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*^{Jos.1:9} Don't let anyone steal God's Word from your heart. *Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off with no one to rescue.*^{Is.5:29}

Cockerels: Be Fearless regardless of cost. Jesus said, *If anyone wants to follow me, he must say no to himself. He must pick up his cross and follow me. If he wants to save his life, he will lose it. But if he loses his life for me, he will find it.*^{Matt.16:24-25}

Goats: Be Protective. *Live in peace with each other. We ask you, brothers and sisters, to warn those who do not work. Encourage the people who are afraid. Help those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. Be sure that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to do what is good for each other and for all people. Always be joyful. Pray continually, and give thanks whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus.*^{1Thes.5:13-18}

Kings: Be Confident in your Saviour. A king who has his army around him is impervious to coups and usurpers. *And I am confident that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*^{Phil.1:6} *And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world.*^{1Jn.4:17}

But if we become proud we are guaranteed to invite trouble and will soon become embroiled in conflict.

As we apply these life-lessons we find that life is more than existence – true life is knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ^{Jn.17:3} and this life is controlled by Christ Himself not by our circumstances.

Let's continue to learn from animals – Bold, Fearless, Protective, Confident - but live like kings!

Sunday 8th June 2014. Ps.134 Acts 3

Did you know what your inheritance is?

And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring [Seed] all peoples on earth will be blessed.'^{Acts 3:25}

An inheritance is something that is passed by law to an heir on the death of the owner. As Christians we have a glorious inheritance but we will live in spiritual poverty if we don't know what our inheritance is. Paul prayed that we may *know what is the hope of*

His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.^{Eph.1:17-18}

We are living in incredible times because we are seeing the fulfilment of what the OT Prophets foretold – **the Kingdom of God where Jesus the Promised Messiah is ruling our lives:** *Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. Men will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them.”^{Lk.17:20-23} But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it.*^{Matt.13:16-17}

When God declared His Promises to the OT Patriarchs and Prophets, they were not casual remarks but a Contract (Covenant, Testament or Will) that would legally pass on an inheritance to named heirs when the Owner died. By making His promise a **Covenant**, God ensured that it could not be broken, annulled or added to. *Once a person's will has been ratified, no one else can annul it or add to it. Now, the promises were made to Abraham and to his descendant. You will observe that Scripture, in the careful language of a legal document, does not say “to descendants,” referring to everybody in general, but “to your descendant” (the noun, note, is singular), referring to Christ. This is the way I interpret this: A will, earlier ratified by God, is not annulled by an addendum attached 430 years later, thereby negating the promise of the will. No, this addendum, with its instructions and regulations, has nothing to do with the promised inheritance in the will.*^{Gal.3:15-18} *Jesus' death released our inheritance to us: For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living... Christ died once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*^{Heb.9:15-28}

So what is our Inheritance? Our inheritance is first and foremost **Salvation**. When Emmanuel Twagirimana visited us he emphasised that **to inherit eternal life one must be saved** - the **unsaved**, (those who do not receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour,) will not enter heaven indeed those whose names are not written in the book of life **cannot enter in heaven**. *Anyone whose name was not written in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.*^{Rev.20:15}

Our inheritance of Salvation is through the New Birth - which is the result of Jesus' death and resurrection: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us **new birth** into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. **This inheritance** is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*^{1Pet.1:3-5} *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.*^{Eph.2:8-9}

It is God who qualifies us for this inheritance: *giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*^{Col.1:12-14}

Also included in our inheritance is Righteousness - *being right with God*. Abraham is the Father of Believers and so Believers partake of Abraham's inheritance: *So Abraham is the father of all believers... Those who have the same faith that Abraham had are also included. He is*

the father of us all. It is written, "I have made you a father of many nations."^{Rom.4:11-17} Abraham was **counted** righteous (right with God) because he **believed** God (note: Abraham did not earn his righteousness): *Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.*^{Gen.15:6} As this verse is quoted 3 times in the NT^{Rom.4:3;Gal.3:6;Jas.2:23} we can be sure that it has spiritual significance for us today. Although righteousness is credited to us because of faith, we must continue to live by faith after we become right with God: *But the one who is right with God will live by faith.*^{Hab.2:4} This verse is also quoted 3 times in the NT^{Rom.1:17;Gal.3:11;Heb.10:38} showing that this too has spiritual significance for us today. (Note, some translations include: *He who is righteous by faith shall live.*)

Righteousness (right-wiseness) is *being right with God and being wise about it.* Unless we do something with this information (that we are right with God) it is of no value to us. *Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? ... Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.*^{Jas.2:17-18}

So what should we do with our *Inheritance of Righteousness*?

Learn: Understanding the teaching about righteousness is an essential part of growing in the faith and includes speaking the Word of God (i.e. saying what God says): Righteousness is God's nature but has now become our nature: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} If we learn something we will talk about it too: *Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, (literally "a non-speaker") is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.*^{Heb.5:13}

Live right: We need to make sure we that we live up to our testimony. Walkers walk, runners run, Believers believe and Righteous people live right! *Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous... Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God.*^{1Jn.3:7-9}

Pray: We should also remember that our prayers are powerful and effective: *When a believing person prays, great things happen.*^{Jas.5:16}

Last week we saw that we should learn from Nature (including lions) and not let anyone steal God's Word (or our inheritance) from us. *Their roar is like that of the lion, they roar like young lions; they growl as they seize their prey and carry it off with no one to rescue.*^{Is.5:29} Our inheritance is also our birthright and is too important to lose or to sell: *Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.*^{Heb.12:16-17}

Let's value what God has given us and live up to His expectations.

Sunday 15th June 2014. Ps.135:13-21. Acts 4

What can we do when people are upset with our Faith.

They were very upset by what the apostles were teaching the people. The apostles were saying that because Jesus rose from the dead, people can be raised from the dead.^{Acts 4:2}

The paradox of Christianity is that there is so much conflict connected with Jesus who is the Prince of Peace. Simeon told Mary that Jesus would be misunderstood and opposed: *This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel, a figure misunderstood and contradicted - the pain of a sword-thrust through you - -but the rejection will force honesty, as God reveals who they really are.*^{Lk.2:34-35} Jesus said: *I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is! And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it.*^{Matt.11:11-12} *Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me. (Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed.)*^{Lk.7:23}

Jesus' message was offensive: *And they took offense at him*^{Matt.13:57} and Christian message is also offensive: *If I were no longer preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, no one would be offended.*^{Gal.5:11} Jesus brought division: *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*^{Matt.10:34} Christians also bring division: *When people realize it is the living God you are presenting and not some idol that makes them feel good, they are going to turn on you, even people in your own family. There is a great irony here: proclaiming so much love, experiencing so much hate! But don't give up and don't give in. It is all well worth it in the end. It is not success you are after in such times but survival. Be survivors! Before you've run out of options, the Son of Man will have arrived.*^{Matt.10:21-23}

Here are six principles to guide us when people get upset by our faith.

1 Acknowledge the Sovereignty of God: *Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them... everything ...was determined beforehand according to your will.*^{Acts4:24-28}

Acknowledging God's sovereignty helps us to see our situation from God's perspective and gives us the security of knowing that nothing catches God off guard and that He has already prepared a solution to our problems! *Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.*^{Jer.32:17} 'Jesus is Lord' is more than a slogan – it is the *Truth that sets us free.*^{Jn.8:32}

2 Appeal to Scripture: *You spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying...*^{Acts 4:25} Appealing to Scripture gives us a point of reference - an anchor - and it also reinforces God's sovereignty. **The Bible is God's Will in a book!** However, because we are under the New Covenant where our sins are forgiven and our guilt is removed, we must read the Bible "through the glasses" of Jesus' death, resurrection and Ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. By studying the Scriptures we can know what God's purposes are and we can also discover what He has did in the past in situations similar to ours.

3 Admit there is a Spiritual conspiracy: *Why are the nations so violently moved, and why are the thoughts of the people so foolish? The kings of the earth were lifted up, the rulers came together, against the Lord, and against his Christ: For, truly, in this town, against your holy servant, Jesus who was marked out by you as Christ, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, came together, to do that which had been fixed before by your hand and your purpose.*^{Acts4:25-28} There is a real world beyond this physical world where real devils are plotting the downfall of everything that is good and wholesome, and they do it by deceiving and controlling people. Although the demonic influence is world-wide and sometimes experienced with horrific consequences, we are not to be intimidated because when Jesus died on the cross, He defeated and disarmed satan and also destroyed his works. *Yes, when Christ died, he died to defeat the power of sin one time—enough for all time.*^{Rom.6:10} *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*^{Col.2:15} *But the Son of God came to destroy the devil's work.*^{1Jn.3:8}

4 Ask to Speak God's Word then Actually Speak it with boldness: *And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.*^{Acts4:29} The antidote to the spiritual conspiracy is not silent fear but speaking God's Word with boldness. This is God's weapon for us to use. *May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands.*^{Ps.149:6} *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.*^{Heb.4:12} *We don't give up when we are beaten or put in prison. When people stir up trouble in the streets, we continue to serve God. We work hard for him. We go without sleep and food. We remain pure. We understand completely what it means to serve God. We are patient and kind. We serve him in the power of the Holy Spirit. We serve him with true love. We speak the truth. We serve in the power of God. We hold the weapons of godliness in the right hand and in the left.*

We serve God in times of glory and shame. We serve him whether the news about us is bad or good. We are true to our calling. But people treat us as if we were pretenders. We are known, but people treat us as if we were unknown. We are dying, but we continue to live. We are beaten, but we are not killed. We are sad, but we are always full of joy. We are poor, but we make many people rich. We have nothing, but we own everything.^{2Cor.6:5-10}

5 Ask for Signs and wonders: *Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*^{Acts4:30} Jesus demonstrated His authority with tangible evidence in order to help people trust God but also to show people His compassion. *Right away Jesus knew what they were thinking. So he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Is it easier to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven'? Or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."* Then Jesus spoke to the man who could not walk. "I tell you," he said, "get up. Take your mat and go home." The man got up and took his mat. Then he walked away while everyone watched. *All the people were amazed. They praised God and said, "We have never seen anything like this!"*^{Mk.2:8-12} We are living in the Church era where Jesus has commissioned us to *Go into all the world. Preach the good news to everyone... Here are the miraculous signs that those who believe will do. In my name they will drive out demons. They will speak in languages they had not known before. They will pick up snakes with their hands. And when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all. They will place their hands on sick people. And the people will get well.*^{Mk.16:15-18} Helping people by offering them God's love in action is God's answer to their hate, hurt and helplessness. *By praying for our enemies, God ensures that they live long enough to witness the blessing of the Lord in our lives that they wished we wouldn't have. In that way their hearts are won to Christ.*^{Seven Days in Heaven by Emmanuel Twagirimana}

6 Anticipate the Supernatural: *After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.*^{Acts4:31} Faith really believes that God is going to intervene in our lives. Kathryn Kuhlman said that "expectancy is the atmosphere for miracles". This is not the *power of positive thinking* or *mind over matter* but the principle of God rewarding those who believe: *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*^{Heb.11:6}

Yes! When God comes, He always comes in power! So when people get upset with our Faith, don't lose heart but follow these 6 principles and see God bring about another great victory for us and His kingdom.

Sunday 22nd June 2014. Ps.136. Matt.6 (Margaret Fermor).

Do you use the Lord's Prayer as a Patter or a Pattern?

What we refer to as the Lord's Prayer in fact this is not Jesus' Prayer but is a Pattern for how Jesus taught we should pray. It is not meant to be repeated 'parrot fashion' but it is an explanation of what Jesus' earthly mission was to accomplish.

- 1. To bring mankind into a relationship with their heavenly Father.**
- 2. To teach and establish God's kingdom on earth and to show God's will for His people.**
- 3. To perform miraculous acts, showing Gods power.**
- 4. To bring mankind out of their sinful state and to teach the way of forgiveness.**
- 5. To demonstrate His authority over satan, the tempter.**

All of this to bring glory and honour to God our Heavenly Father – Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

All of Jesus' preaching was focused on establishing this kingdom of power and glory.

Matthew 4:17 – From that time on Jesus began to preach: repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.

Matthew 4:23 – Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

For us now, Jesus has established this new kingdom, the benefits of which we can enjoy mostly in part now, but read the *beautiful attitudes* (beatitudes) from **Matthew 5:1-12**. Here there is good news and not so good news. Jesus is preparing his disciples for the rough road ahead. The kingdom of heaven requires a very different quality of life style. Heavenly values are not the same as earthly values.

Read: Luke 6:24-31. The wealth and eat drink and be merry of this world is not going to last forever. Jesus was ushering in an eternal kingdom - a kingdom of power and glory that will last **for ever and ever!**

This kingdom of heaven is built on God's abundant riches where those who are mourning, meek and spiritually poor receive all they need from God's abundant provision of blessing - and much, much more! **This is a kingdom where mercy, purity, peace and righteousness is the moral and spiritual standard.** Jesus said, 'You are salt and light. Let your light shine before men. Let people see that your love for God is genuine.' This is very different from the Pharisees and teachers of the law who wanted to be seen for their position in society.

Read: Matthew 15:1-9. Jesus taught the kingdom of God based on the 10 commandments. **Read: Matthew 15:10-20.** Murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander are all the 'shalt nots' and Jesus taught about them before teaching 'the Lord's prayer'. Jesus made it clear that even if people keep religious observances, they can be unclean by what comes out from their heart through their mouth. Later on, Jesus condensed the 10 commandments into 2 when questioned by the teachers of the law.

Read: Mark 12:28-34. Jesus commended this man for his insight. 'You are not far from the kingdom of God', but warned a little while later against lengthy and showy prayers.

Read: Mark 12:38-40.

So then, how should we live and pray?

Titus 3:1-8. We should be obedient, peaceable and considerate.

1Peter 2:9-12. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

Colossians 3:12-14. Live with compassion and kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Forgive one another.

This is how we should live and indeed what the early church was commended for. If we think, speak, give and live as believers we will be able to stand firm when times of trouble come. *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*^{1s.7:9} Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.^{1Pet.5:9} Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.^{1Cor.16:13-14}

Look at Peter and John for an example.

Read: Acts 4:8-13 – It was so evident that if we spend time with Jesus, when we pray we will follow the pattern of prayer that He taught.

Read: Acts 4:23-31. That's the power of prayer! This then is how we should pray.

A Prayer of FAITH:

F – Pray to the Father. Face the Facts. His name is to be hallowed – He is holy, sacred and to be revered.

A – Agree and give Assent to Gods Kingdom and will. He is the Sovereign Lord.

I – Imagine the Impossible. We can Interact with God. Talk about your needs, however great, trivial or basic. God has promised to meet our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

T - Trust God to do what He says He will do. But remember to forgive others because God has said He cannot forgive you if you don't!

H – HALLELUJAH – End on a high note, giving praise and glory to God.

Yes! His is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen!

Sunday 29th June 2014. Ps.138. Acts 5.

Can you explain why you believe that your Faith is credible?

Science is based on empirical evidence, (at least it is supposed to be!) where actions and reactions are observed and noted. If there is a pattern of similar results which can be repeated under similar conditions, it is recorded as a “*law of science*” and then this information can be used to our advantage. For instance, once we know how long it takes to hatch an egg, we can farm chicken more efficiently because the guesswork has been removed. The same applies to the gestation period of animals, growing crops etc., etc.

True Faith is not wishful thinking or an imagination of our mind - it is believing the believable, not believing something that is unbelievable! And so with our Christian faith: it is not left to chance nor is it a fancy of our mind. By looking at the evidence of Scripture and the testimony of people's lives being blessed and transformed (including a compassion for other people), we recognize a “*law of science*” that is repeated wherever the Gospel is preached – the principle of: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*^{Rom.10:17}

We can reasonably trust the evidence from Scripture, which we take as God's Word, because it really works in Believers' lives;^{1Thes.2:13} and there is no criticism of the Scriptures which can validly destroy our faith. *We know that Scripture is always true.*^{Jn.10:35} *After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.*^{Jn.2:20} *"People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of the Lord remains forever." And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.*^{1Pet.1:24-25} *Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.*^{Ps.119:89} But even though we accept the Scripture as valid and trustworthy, we still have to apply it – that is, put our faith in God as revealed by Jesus Christ who is that Word personified: *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.*^{Jn1:1}

The word **Faith** in our Bible does not mean something that is vague or nebulous like “*blind-faith*” or “*leap of faith*”! **Faith** means **trust, being convinced, assured, confident and persuaded.** God has given us more than enough information to be convinced that He is trustworthy and therefore we can trust Him. *When God wanted to guarantee his promises, he gave his word, a rock-solid guarantee—God can't break his word. And because his word cannot change, the promise is likewise unchangeable. We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It's an unbreakable spiritual lifeline (an anchor that keeps the soul), reaching past all appearances right to the very presence of God where Jesus, running on ahead of us, has taken up his permanent post as high priest for us, in the order of Melchizedek.*^{Heb.6:17-20}

So we have to decide whether Jesus, who revealed God personally, was a Prophet or a pretender; honest or hypocrite; faithful or faker; because if we are in any doubt then our faith is at best “*wishful thinking*” or an unsubstantiated “*hope*”. Either Jesus is reliable or He is unreliable. Either He told the truth or he lied and therefore is unreliable when He said: *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... “Don't you believe that I am in the Father? Don't you believe that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. The Father lives in me. He is*

the One who is doing his work. Believe me when I say I am in the Father. Also believe that the Father is in me. Or at least believe what the miracles show about me.^{Jn.14:9-11} C.S. Lewis said “Jesus was either a **Lord, Liar, or Lunatic!** Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about Him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” If we cannot totally believe Jesus or His Disciples who personally knew Him before and after His resurrection, then we have no basis for our faith and we are deluded. *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith doesn't mean anything. Your sins have not been forgiven. Those who have died believing in Christ are also lost. Do we have hope in Christ only for this life? Then people should pity us more than anyone else.* **But** Christ really has been raised from the dead. He is the first of all those who will rise.^{1Cor.15:17-20}

The New Testament was compiled by people who lived at that time and so that gives them and their testimony, an integrity and reliability that would stand up in any British Law Court. *Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you... so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.*^{Lk.1:1-4} Jesus provided far more God-revealing signs than are written down in this book. These are written down so you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way he personally revealed it.^{Jn.20:30-31}

When Paul testified before Festus and Agrippa, he explained that his faith was reasonable. *But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.* At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defence. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.” “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”^{Acts.26:22-27}

But there was also another witness to the events in the Gospels, who is still here today: *We are witnesses of these things and so is **the Holy Spirit**, whom God has given to those who obey him.*^{Acts 5:32} **To oppose the Holy Spirit's testimony is perverse!** *But if you persist in your slanders against God's Holy Spirit, you are repudiating the very One who forgives, sawing off the branch on which you're sitting, severing by your own perversity all connection with the One who forgives.*^{Mk. 3:29}

People take historians seriously – like Tacitus (AD56 – 117) who was a senator and a historian of the Roman Empire; Josephus (AD37 – 100) who recorded Jewish history, especially in the 1st Century AD; or Bede (AD672– 735) who wrote *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. And yet few people are willing to take the Bible seriously. This is because they would have to change their view of God, society, life and even death. Instead they live “*with their heads in the sand*” hoping that if they ignore the evidence they will not have to face up to reality. But the consequences of ignoring God (which is the same as disagreeing with Him) are severe: *How terrible it will be for anyone who argues with his Maker!*^{Js.45:9}

With so much evidence from reliable witnesses, we are fools not to put our trust in God: *And Jesus Christ was revealed as God's Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross—not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with his testimony. So we have these three witnesses—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—and all three agree. Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this*

testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.^{1Jn.5:6-12}

Trusting God gives us a godly contentment^{1Tim.6:6} in the sure knowledge that Jesus is Lord.^{Rom.10:9;Phil.2:11} We have Forgiveness of sins;^{Rom.4:7;Eph.1:7} Peace with God;^{Rom.5:1} and Eternal life.^{Jn.3:16;Rom.6:23} **Faith is not wishful thinking but the sensible, logical, conclusion of reviewing the facts of God, Man, Jesus, Cross and the Resurrection and concluding that God is right.**

Yes, our faith is credible, and we owe it to our children as well as to ourselves, to give a valid reason for it. *But make sure in your hearts that Christ is Lord. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect.*^{1Pet.3:15}

July:

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way. Col.1:9-10

Sunday 6th July 2014. Ps.139:1-14.

As it's Family Service this week I have included some Quick Thoughts from other people:

Does It Matter If We Evolved? *Greg Koukl. www.str.org*

If Darwinism is true, then there is no purpose or meaning to life, there is no morality, there's no qualitative difference between humans and animals, there's no life after death, and there's no purpose to human history. Now, are you trying to tell me that it doesn't really matter if people believe we evolved or not?

Putting Them Out of Their Misery? *Greg Koukl. www.str.org*

When a person claims that suicide will end a person's suffering, they are making a religious claim about the nature of life after death. This cannot be avoided. They are counting on the fact that there is no conscious existence beyond the grave, or that whatever greets us will be pleasant, an improvement on the misery of life on this earth. If they are wrong, though, and there is a hell awaiting those who deserve it, then for some euthanasia will not end misery, but compound it. The person suffering here on earth is not transported to a place of peace and rest, but rather to an infinitely greater suffering in hell. It is theoretically possible, then, that "mercy killing" could actually be an act of cruelty. More is at stake here than some people realize.

Worship "*I was just thinking*" *Contemporary Issues as seen by George Canty*

Worship may be about God's greatness, but Christian worship extols what Jesus was, what Jesus is, Jesus did, and what Jesus does. He is the reason we worship.

Acts 2 says the Spirit gave the disciples utterance. That is our experience also. It is a distinction possessed by no other faith on earth, echoed by the redeemed myriads in heaven and earth like the sound of many waters. Sing! Make His praise glorious!

Christian worshipers don't seek God just to curry favour with Him about their sins. Jesus is with every believer, already, all the time - **they have already found grace with Him** and their sins blotted out by his sacrifice on the Cross. Christians are not made by words, ceremony, joining a church, or by belonging to a special race or country, but it is a personal relationship with Jesus. Christians don't await judgment to know their eternal destiny. **They belong to Jesus now and always will.** He gives them eternal life, and they will never come into judgment. Christianity is power, not just words or a way to worship. Christians don't have to keep 'holy days', but they have days when they rejoice - days that have no parallel in all the world. At Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost Jesus wrought historic and eternal victories, releasing the power of salvation to all who believe. Jesus only asks for trust and love, not ritual. He demands no pilgrimages, no visits to holy shrines or places. Christians need no holy clothes or special physical posturing; Christianity is of the heart, not the knees. Jesus does demand love and concern, to do good, and to pray even for one's enemies.

Music is only a matter of taste and taste always comes by conditioning, but what we sing about is not a matter of taste. The best of the older Christian praise came from inspired and mature Christians with poetic and creative genius. **My point is that Christian worship in song should give passionate expression to the wonderful works of God in Christ.** A well-known musician confessed he had written songs we've all sung before he even knew what true salvation was. I've wondered if other songsters really know either, judging by their lyrics. Basing songs on the Psalms alone won't do when we have the New Testament. **We have a right in church to expect songs with Christian**

content. Today congregations fervently sing lines that have no identifiable Bible base. Often no deity is named, some could be sung by followers of any religion. One I heard recently addressed fervent love just to 'you' in language that would have suited any secular song. **In any case it is His love, not ours that should be our theme.** The name of Jesus, is used less and less, substituted by "you" and "your", so unless songs express unmistakable Christian truth they might be songs to Allah or Buddha. John Lennon's 'My sweet Lord', meant Krishna. We used to sing "Oh how I love the Saviour's name!" **Don't we love the name of Jesus anymore?** Are Bernard of Clairvaux's inspired verses of "Jesus the very thought of Thee, with sweetness fills my breast" too passionate for our lips today? People may have Jesus in mind when singing about 'you', but His name itself is vital to our prayer and worship. "Whatsoever things you do, do all in the name of Jesus". Surely this applies to worship songs? At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, not at the name of 'you'. Lovely modern compositions are being produced which I greatly appreciate; **if they exalt Jesus, the music is secondary. We can discard the old-fashioned but what is old is not always old-fashioned. Sing to the Lord!**

"An Open Letter to Praise Bands" by James K.A. Smith

1. **If we, the congregation, can't hear ourselves, it's not worship.** Christian worship is not a concert. In a concert (a particular "form of performance"), we often expect to be overwhelmed by sound, particularly in certain styles of music. In a concert, we come to expect that weird sort of sensory deprivation that happens from sensory overload, when the pounding of the bass on our chest and the wash of music over the crowd leaves us with the rush of a certain aural vertigo. And there's nothing wrong with concerts! It's just that Christian worship is not a concert. Christian worship is a collective, communal, congregational practice--and the gathered sound and harmony of a congregation singing *as one* is integral to the practice of worship. It is a way of "performing" the reality that, in Christ, we are one body. But that requires that we actually be able to hear ourselves, and hear our sisters and brothers singing alongside us. When the amped sound of the praise band overwhelms congregational voices, we can't hear ourselves sing--so we lose that communal aspect of the congregation and are encouraged to effectively become "private," passive worshipers.

2. **If we, the congregation, can't sing along, it's not worship.** In other forms of musical performance, musicians and bands will want to improvise and "be creative," offering new renditions and exhibiting their virtuosity with all sorts of different trills and pauses and improvisations on the received tune. Again, that can be a delightful aspect of a concert, but in Christian worship it just means that we, the congregation, can't sing along. And so your virtuosity gives rise to our passivity; your creativity simply encourages our silence. And while *you* may be worshipping *with* your creativity, the same creativity actually shuts down congregational song.

Worship leaders, if you look out over the congregation and you see that we are not singing with you, something has gone wrong. Are you jamming alone up there for extended periods of time? Are you changing well-known melodies just enough to surprise us and make us hesitant to sing out, and/or adding flair that we can't follow? Are you choosing soloistic songs with complicated melodies rather than musically simple ones designed for group singing?

The best thing you can do is to consider carefully the purpose of your role as you make your decisions for each service. You have the noble position of enabling all of us to draw together as one before God to express our love and honour through a powerful medium. If you can keep that goal in mind—the goal of enabling the *congregation* to

worship—and ruthlessly shed anything, however musically tempting, that doesn't advance that goal, we will thank you.

Sunday 13th July 2014. Ps.139:14-24. Acts 6.

What sort of wisdom do you have?

There is a worldly wisdom that promotes reason but denies God; and there is a spiritual wisdom that promotes Jesus Christ and expects the miraculous.^{1Cor.1:26-2:13} Worldly wisdom is human logic and reasoning that is based on our senses but denies the unseen spiritual realm of God's kingdom. **Spiritual wisdom is God's wisdom as seen in Jesus Christ**^{1Cor.1:30} and is demonstrated in changed lives and circumstances and especially peace with God.

The first recorded conflict within the Church is in Acts 6 where some of the Believers had been overlooked and felt aggrieved. The situation was resolved by using godly wisdom and common sense. It would seem obvious that the Church did pray about the situation because *they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*^{Acts.2:42} But they didn't have to wait for days or months before they acted after "hearing from God". No! They used their godly common sense and acted in accordance with their knowledge of God because they knew Emmanuel - God was with them,^{Matt.1:23} that He is Present^{Ez.48:35} and that *God is our place of safety. He gives us strength. He is always there to help us in times of trouble.*^{Ps.46:1}

The Church is where God's wisdom should be made known – through Believers: *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known... according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*^{Eph.3:10-12} This happens when we apply the principles of God's kingdom (as recorded in Scriptures) to our daily lives: *Give me the common sense to apply Your rules to everything I do.*^{Ps.119:125(TLB)} Accessing God's wisdom requires involving God in our daily lives. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*^{Pron.3:5-6} God's wisdom is applicable to every situation whatever the circumstances! *Don't worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong... Trust in the LORD and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you... Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper—it only leads to harm.*^{Ps.37:1-8}

Philip, Stephen and the others gladly took the opportunity to serve God in the very mundane but practical role of "serving at tables".^{Acts.6:6} They didn't complain that it was "beneath them" or that it was not "spiritual" enough and God honoured their willing obedience with even greater opportunities to display His wisdom: *Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people.*^{Acts.6:8} *Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did.*^{Acts.8:6}

We too will have even more opportunities for God to display His wisdom through us when we are faithful with what God has already given to us. But we each have different gifts and different opportunities: *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other. Never be lazy, but*

work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.^{Rom.12:6-13}

If we are “in fellowship” (i.e. in a good and comfortable relationship with God and other Believers), **Bible literate** (i.e. have a good working knowledge of the Bible as a NT Believer) **and are faithful in our giving** (i.e. giving ourselves as well as our possessions: *they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives.*^{2Cor.8:5}) **we should expect God to lead us by the Holy Spirit:** *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.*^{Jn.16:13} So when God guides us^{Psa.23:2} and leads us with a prompting of the Holy Spirit, we can expect God to display His wisdom through us as we make sound choices, if we don't intentionally place any obstacles in the way: *those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*^{Rom.8:14} By being aware of God's abiding presence with us and living our whole life as an offering of thanksgiving (appreciation) to Him,^{Rom.12:1-2} we can facilitate the display of God's wisdom through us: *Do everything you say or do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Always give thanks to God the Father through Christ. Work at everything you do with all your heart. Work as if you were working for the Lord, not for human masters. Work because you know that you will finally receive as a reward what the Lord wants you to have. You are serving the Lord Christ.*^{Col.3:17;23;24}

Jesus has already told us to go into the whole world^{Matt.28:19} so we don't need to spend hours praying about what to do – if it is in our heart to do it then do it! *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.*^{Ecd.9:10} Paul the Apostle did not spend months waiting to “hear from God” but took direction from the Holy Spirit's prompting: *Afterward Paul felt compelled by the Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before going to Jerusalem. "And after that," he said, "I must go on to Rome!"*^{Acts.19:21} However God may well re-direct us at any time and so we must be willing to change what we do if God does speak to us: *“Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.” But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: “Go and tell my servant...”*^{2Sam.7:3-5} *This is the message from the one who is holy and true, the one who has the key of David. What he opens, no one can close; and what he closes, no one can open.*^{Rev.3:7;Is.22:22}

In the past God spoke in many ways: *Why do you claim that God never answers any of our questions? He speaks in one way and then another. We might not even realize it. He might speak in a dream or in a vision at night. That's when people are sound asleep in their beds. He might speak in their ears. His warnings might terrify them. He warns men in order to turn them away from sinning. He wants to keep them from being proud... God does all of those things to people. In fact, he does them again and again. He wants to stop people from going down into the grave. Then the light that leads to life will shine on them.*^{Job.33:1-13} But He now speaks through Jesus: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*^{Heb.1:1-2} This does not exclude dreams, visions, prophecies, encouragements and even circumstances but they will **ALWAYS be compatible with the Biblical facts of Jesus' Kingdom, especially His vicarious death, resurrection and ascension and the accompanied outpouring of the Holy Spirit.**

God plans our circumstances: *Job replied to the LORD, “I know that you can do anything. No one can keep you from doing what you plan to do. You asked me, ‘Who do you think you are to disagree with my plans?...’ I spoke about things I didn't completely understand. I talked about things that were too wonderful for me to know.”*^{Job.42:1-3} *He knows us far better than we know ourselves and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.*^{Rom.8:27-28} And so we can trust God to display His wisdom through us - which may not always be comfortable but will lead to “saving lives” – spiritually at least!

You meant to hurt me, but God turned your evil into good to save the lives of many people, which is being done. ^{Gen.50:20}

Broken eggs can't be mended but you can make a good omelette out of them! We can't undo our past but we can affect our future. **When we apply the principals of Jesus' Kingdom and obey His leading, God will display His wisdom – His spiritual wisdom as seen in Jesus Christ** ^{1Cor.1:30} - **through us, which will be demonstrated in changed lives and circumstances and especially peace with God. Then like Stephen, we too will confound the wisdom of the world:** *But the Spirit was helping him to speak with wisdom, and his words were so strong that they could not argue with him.* ^{Acts.6:10}

So what sort of wisdom do you have? Let's be like the wise man and build our house upon the solid Rock ^{Matt.7:24} **of Jesus Christ** ^{1Cor.10:4} **because when the storms are past it is the righteous who remain.** ^{Pron.24:3-4}

Sunday 20th July 2014 Ps.143. Acts 7.

Are our Traditions important?

Stephen was accused of trying to change the Jewish traditions: *We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place. He says Jesus will change the traditions that Moses handed down to us.* ^{Acts.6:14} When Stephen made his defence, he explained the purpose and limitations of the OT Jewish religion and that those traditions of Moses were too new - it was time to go back to the original pattern. Starting with Abraham, Stephen explained that he had no Temple and no Mosaic law – just a Promise that was confirmed by the covenant of circumcision. ^{Acts.7:8}

By tracing the history of the Jews, Stephen showed that God is not restricted to a place or a people. But even though the Jews had the privilege of first-hand information about God and His protocol, they persisted in resisting the Holy Spirit to the point of persecuting the true prophets and even killing those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. ^{Acts.7:51} *The holy place,* ^{Acts.6:13} (i.e. *Temple*) was not where God “*dwell*” because He is eternal and is much, much greater than a building: *But the Most High God does not live in houses made by human hands. As God says through the prophet, 'Heaven is my throne. The earth is under my control. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Where will my resting place be? Didn't my hand make all these things?'* ^{Acts.7:48-50} Moses made a Tent (*Tabernacle*) where God visited people and it was only much later that the Temple was built under King Solomon, so historically the Temple was not essential to worshipping God! Even Moses, who had given the Jews them the Law, was not taken seriously by them as they consistently opposed him and rejected his teachings (including the instructions about the Messiah: *Moses said, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.'* ^{Acts.3:22}

Stephen said that they did not take *the traditions of Moses* seriously: *You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.* ^{Acts.7:51-53}

And yes! Jesus has changed the traditions that Moses handed down. The Old Covenant is now obsolete ^{Heb.8:13} **and there is now a New Covenant that is not dependant on human priests but on one Priest – Jesus Christ;** the Temple sacrifices have been superseded by **Jesus' one Sacrifice** on the Cross; the pageantry of the Temple ceremonies and hierarchy have been dispensed with because true religion has reverted back to the original faith of Abraham, the father of all who Believe, ^{Rom.4:11} where no priest or temple, ceremony or hierarchy is needed to worship God – just **faith and obedience.**

Is it not obvious to you that persons who put their trust in Christ (not persons who put their trust in the law!) are like Abraham: children of faith? ...So those now who live by faith are blessed along with Abraham, who lived by faith—this is no new doctrine! And that means that anyone who tries to live by his own effort, independent of God, is doomed to failure. Scripture backs this up: “Utterly cursed is every person who fails to carry out every detail written in the Book of the law.” ...Doing things for God is the opposite of entering into what God does for you. Habakkuk had it right: “The person who believes God, is set right by God—and that's the real life.” Rule-keeping does not naturally evolve into living by faith, but only perpetuates itself in more and more rule-keeping, a fact observed in Scripture: “The one who does these things [rule-keeping] continues to live by them.” Christ redeemed us from that self-defeating, cursed life by absorbing it completely into himself. Do you remember the Scripture that says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”? That is what happened when Jesus was nailed to the Cross: He became a curse, and at the same time dissolved the curse. And now, because of that, the air is cleared and we can see that Abraham's blessing is present and available for non-Jews, too. We are all able to receive God's life, his Spirit, in and with us by believing—just the way Abraham received it.^{Gal.3:7-14}

Just as worldly wisdom is opposed to godly wisdom because it doesn't take God into account, so religious observance is opposed to faith: *The law is not based on faith. In fact, it is just the opposite. It teaches that “the one who does those things will live by them.”*^{Gal.3:12} Religion will always try to “cover-up” like Adam with his fig leaves,^{Gen.3:7} however Jesus is not interested in leaves but fruit.^{Mat.21:18-21}

That's why we are so emphatic about NT Truth - about interpreting the Bible in the light of Jesus' vicarious death, resurrection and ascension and the accompanied outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We must stand up and even fight for our faith because there are many who would dilute it and pollute it: *Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses.*^{1Tim.6:12} Dear friends, I've dropped everything to write you about this life of salvation that we have in common. I have to write insisting—begging!—that you fight with everything you have in you for this faith entrusted to us as a gift to guard and cherish. What has happened is that some people have infiltrated our ranks (our Scriptures warned us this would happen), who beneath their pious skin are shameless scoundrels. Their design is to replace the sheer grace of our God with sheer license—which means doing away with Jesus Christ, our one and only Master.^{Jude.1:3-4}

However we must ensure that it is our faith that we are defending and not just traditions. Traditions can be good but they must never conflict with God's commands: *You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!*^{Mk.7:9}

When we defend traditions of the Church, let's make sure they are not new traditions or even old traditions, but **the original traditions** – the traditions that the Apostles first handed down: *I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.*^{1Cor.11:2}

Paul sincerely and zealously kept his “church” traditions but they were the OT traditions of Moses not God's traditions: *For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*^{Gal.1:13-14}

We can be sincere but sincerely wrong! I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God.^{Rom.10:2-4}

We must also be gracious to those who are different and even to those who are wrong. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear.^{1Pet.3:15-16} Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made. Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn

from those who follow our example. For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Saviour. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.^{Phil.3:15-21}

Yes tradition is important and worth fighting for with persuasion, passion and persistence – even Church traditions. But let's contend for the original traditions of the Church but not get entangled with traditions - either old or new -that are now obsolete!

Sunday 27th July 2014. Ps.144. Acts 8

How good is your Comprehension? *Do you understand what you are reading?*^{Acts.8:30}

The purpose of writing is to preserve information for future use, whether it is for pleasure or work, fiction or non-fiction. There are many reasons for reading – enjoyment, information, research, confirmation, etc. but if there is no comprehension, there is little point reading - whether it is poetry, prose, novels, biographies, history or manuals! Napoleon Bonaparte studied history because he understood the value of learning: *Read over and over again the campaigns of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus, Turenne, and Frederic the Great. This is the only way to become a great general.* The Bible was compiled with the purpose of preserving information for posterity so future generations (including us) could learn, not just the facts of history and culture, but the lessons of history too and so avoid their mistakes: *The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us.*^{Rom.4:23-24} *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*^{1Cor.10:11-13}

If the Bible was only a history book, it would be worth studying for that reason alone, but it is much, much more than that - it is life giving and powerful enough to change lives: *The word of God is living and active. It is sharper than any sword that has two edges. It cuts deep enough to separate soul from spirit. It can separate joints from bones. It judges the thoughts and purposes of the heart. Nothing God created is hidden from him. His eyes see everything. He will hold us accountable for everything we do.*^{Heb.4:12-13} *My son, pay attention to what I say. Listen closely to my words. Don't let them out of your sight. Keep them in your heart. They are life to those who find them. They are health to your whole body.*^{Prov.4:20-22}

God's Word is creative: *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.*^{Gen.1:3} *Every word you give me is a miracle word—how could I help but obey? Break open your words, let the light shine out, let ordinary people see the meaning.*^{Ps.119:129-130} **God's Word is powerful:** *For no word from God shall be void of power. (Nothing is impossible with God.)*^{Lk.1:37} *The rain and the snow come down from the sky. They do not return to it without watering the earth. They make plants come up and grow. The plants produce seeds for farmers. They also produce food for people to eat. The words I speak are like that. They will not return to me without producing results. They will accomplish what I want them to. They will do exactly what I sent them to do.*^{Is.55:10-11}

This is because Jesus is the Word of God personified: *In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*^{Jn.1:1-2} *A word is only a line on a piece of paper, a dot on a screen or a sound in the ear but when it conveys a meaning, it changes to something that is alive. Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so*

that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.^{Deut.32:46-47} The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.^{Jn.6:63-64} That is why it is important that we actually understand the meaning of what we read and hear, rather than just look at the shapes or listen to the sounds. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” ... “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.^{Act.8:30-35}

The primary ministry of Church leaders is to clearly and accurately teach the meaning of the Scriptures: They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.^{Neb.8:8} Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.^{2Tim.2:15} So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God...^{Act.6:2} **When we see Jesus in the Scriptures, they become precious to us** – not the paper of the Word of God but the **Person of the Word of God:** So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.^{Act.8:35} Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures. He began with Moses and all the Prophets.^{Lk.24:27} Now to you who believe, this stone is precious.^{1Pet.2:7} A.M. Hodgkin wrote an excellent book called “[Christ in all the Scriptures](#)” (available from our website) which looks at the Scriptures and expounds the types and pictures of Jesus. Each example from the OT portrays an aspect of the Ministry of Jesus that is more clearly seen in the Person of Jesus in Gospels and Letters of the NT.

God’s Word is as important and powerful as His Name: ...for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.^{Ps.138:2} Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.^{Phil.2:9-11} But if people ignore God’s written Word why would they believe God’s Living Word? If you believed, really believed, what Moses said, you would believe me. He wrote of me. If you won't take seriously what he wrote, how can I expect you to take seriously what I speak?^{Jn.5:46-47} If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.^{Lk.16:31} One of our greatest tasks today is to encourage people to take God seriously and understand that this life has consequences. God is totally just and misses nothing. It is not just really bad people who will have to give an account to God for their behaviour and conversation but each of us – even “good” people - will: And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak.^{Matt.12:36}

We can, and do, speak on behalf of God when we speak God’s Word: We never stop thanking God for the way you received his word. You heard it from us. But you didn't accept it as a human word. You accepted it for what it really is. It is God's word. It is at work in you who believe.^{1Thes.2:13} But like the Disciples, we too need our minds opened to understand the Bible: Jesus said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything written about me must happen. Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must come true.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.^{Lk.24:44} Non-Christians are blind to spiritual truths in the Scriptures: To this very day, when the Law of Moses is read, a veil covers the minds of those who hear it. But when anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.^{2Cor.3:15-16} **But even Believers need the Holy Spirit’s help to understand the Word of God:** The Spirit helps us understand what God has freely given us. That is what we speak about. We don't use words taught to us by people. We use words taught to us by the Holy Spirit. We use the words of the Spirit to teach the truths of the Spirit. Some people don't have the Holy Spirit.

They don't accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. Things like that are foolish to them. They can't understand them. In fact, such things can't be understood without the Spirit's help.^{1Cor.2:12-14 45}

So let's ensure that we accept the Holy Spirit's help in understanding the Scriptures - then we will be able to pass on to others the good news of Jesus Christ: *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.*^{1Tim.2:5-7} *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.*^{2Tim.2:1-2} **And then let us trust God to use us:** *My greatest joy was putting words together and had I put more trust in the Holy Spirit, I would have had no need to worry. He would call me to the thing that gave me greatest joy – speaking and writing for Him.*^{David Lloyd George (PM 1916-1922)}

August:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Col.3:17

Sunday 3rd August 2014. Ps.145:1-13.

Christ in all the Scriptures

The Bible is God's Revelation of our Redemption in Jesus Christ. Jesus explained that the Scriptures were predominately about Him: *The Scriptures you study give witness about me.*^{Jn.5:39} *Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures. He began with Moses and all the Prophets.*^{Lk.24:27} They were written for our benefit so we could learn about God and how to live for Him. *The words "it was credited to him" were written not for Abraham alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.*^{Rom.4:23-24} *But these are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.*^{Jn.20:31}

Many of the OT historical stories of people and incidents were recorded to illustrate aspects of Jesus' ministry and our redemption. *Brothers and sisters, here is what I want you to know about our people who lived long ago. They were all led by the cloud. They all walked through the Red Sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same supernatural food. They all drank the same supernatural water. They drank from the supernatural rock that went with them. That rock was Christ. But God was not pleased with most of them. Their bodies were scattered all over the desert. Now those things happened as examples for us. They are supposed to keep us from longing for evil things, as the people of Israel did.*^{1Cor.10:1-6} *The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave wife and one from his freeborn wife... These two women serve as an illustration (an allegory or example) of God's two covenants. The first woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai where people received the law that enslaved them. And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia, because she and her children live in slavery to the law. But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the free woman, and she is our mother.*^{Gal.4:22-26}

Today we will look at Adam, Abel and Noah and see how they illustrate Jesus' ministry:

Adam: *Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.*^{Rom.5:14} Adam was created innocent and right with God but by his act of disobedience he brought sin into the world and then death: *You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we're in—first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. But Adam, who got us into this, also points ahead to the One who will get us out of it - Jesus Christ. Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one man said yes to God and put many in the right.*^{Rom.5:12-19} *So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.*^{1Cor.15:21-22}

Jesus is not the 2nd Adam but **the last Adam** because His work is final and there will never be a 3rd or 4th Adam to undo what Jesus did for us! *The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.*^{1Cor.15:45}

Adam illustrates the life-giving work of Jesus by being an antitype of Christ.

Abel: Cain and Abel both came to worship God. God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's because Abel trusted God – he came in **faith** – *It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.*^{Heb.11:4}

Cain felt rejected and he resented Abel. Although God explained how to make the right choices and do the right thing, Cain chose to let his emotions dominate him instead of dominating his emotions. *The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. So Cain became very angry and felt rejected. The LORD asked Cain, "Why are you angry? Why do you look so unhappy? If you do things well, I will accept you, but if you do not do them well, sin is ready to attack you. Sin wants you, but you must rule over it."* ^{Gen.4:4-7}

When Cain killed Abel the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." ^{Gen.4:8-9} When Abel died, his blood cried out for vengeance but when Jesus died, His blood cried out for mercy: *There they nailed Jesus to the cross. He hung between the two criminals. One was on his right and one was on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."* ^{Lk.23:33-34} Jesus' blood cries for mercy much, much louder than Abel's cry for vengeance and so we have the confidence that our sins are forgiven through Jesus' death.

You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel. ^{Heb.12:24}

Abel illustrates the forgiveness of our sins by Jesus' blood.

Noah: Noah was righteousness and also a preacher of Righteousness: *The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation."* ^{Gen.7:1} Noah was saved from the wrath of God against sin by obeying God which teaches us that God will also rescue us from punishment on the day of Judgement: *if God did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.* ^{2Pet.2:5-9}

Our salvation is represented by Noah and also our baptism. However it is not the ritual of baptism that saves us but the resurrection of Jesus: *in the days of Noah... eight persons were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body - but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.* ^{1Pet.3:20-22}

God gave the rainbow as a sign that He would never flood the whole earth again: *Then God said, "I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth... Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth."* Then God said to Noah, "Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth." ^{1Gen.9:12-17} But He has also promised that He will judge the whole earth by fire and used Sodom as an example and to remind us to be ready: *God judged the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He burned them to ashes. He made them an example of what is going to happen to ungodly people.* ^{2Pet.2:6} *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar. Fire will destroy everything in them. God will judge the earth and everything in it. So everything will be destroyed. And what kind of people should you be? You should lead holy and godly lives. Live like that as you look forward to the day of God. It will make the day come more quickly. On that day fire will destroy the heavens. Its heat will melt everything in them. But we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth. Godliness will make its home there. All of this is in keeping with God's promise.* ^{2Pet.3:10-13} *In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking. They were getting married. They were giving their daughters to be married. They did all those things right up to the day Noah entered the ark. They knew nothing about what would*

happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man comes... So keep watch. You do not know on what day your Lord will come. ^{Matt.24:38-42}

However, Believers have nothing to fear because the rainbow also reminds us that God has forgiven us and that He will never be angry with us: “*This day is like the time of Noah to me. I promised then that I would never flood the world again. In the same way, I promise I will not be angry with you or punish you again... my love will never disappear; my promise of peace will not come to an end,*” says the LORD who shows mercy to you. ^{Is.54:9-10}

Noah illustrates how God protects us from the penalty of sin by Jesus’ resurrection.

As we see Christ in all the Scriptures let’s learn the lessons from those examples and pattern our lives on Jesus: *Christ left you an example. He expects you to follow in his steps.* ^{1Pet.2:21}

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ^{Rom.15:5-6}

Sunday 10th August 2014. Ps.145:13:21. Acts 9.

Can you prove that Jesus is the Christ? Acts.9:22

Paul was a Jewish aristocrat who could trace his family line back hundreds of years to Abraham. Although he was brought up at Tarsus (in Turkey), he was educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, (the Jewish equivalent of Oxford or Cambridge University). Paul was a true patriot who meticulously kept and defended his Jewish traditions with passion and zeal - and then he had **an encounter with Jesus Christ!**

Although Jesus had died a couple of years earlier, His followers were telling everyone that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that He had been raised from the dead. This so incensed Paul that he went on a mission – a sort of “*Jewish jihad*” – to stop this heresy. Paul had been given an open “*international arrest warrant*” to detain and bring back to Jerusalem anyone he found promoting these beliefs. However, on the way to Damascus, Paul himself was “*arrested*” by Jesus. When Paul asked “*Who are you Lord?*” the response was “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.*”

The Christian life begins with knowing who Jesus is and then doing something about it. Paul made it his life’s mission to tell others that **JESUS is the CHRIST (Messiah)** and that the traditions of Moses (including the Temple in Jerusalem, the Priests and their animal sacrifices), were now obsolete ^{Jn4:21; Heb.8:13} because their aspiration of the Kingdom of God ushered in by the Messiah was actually fulfilled in Jesus. **Yes! JESUS is the MESSIAH! He is also the HIGH PRIEST of the NEW COVENANT based on the TRUE TEMPLE in heaven where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father!** *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.* ^{1Tim.2:5-7} *So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.* ^{2Tim.1:8-11}

Paul’s life was extreme but it was not exceptional, because although he was used in a greater way than any other Christian, what Paul did should be the norm for all Believers. Whilst Paul preached to thousands of people from the highest in society (Emperor

Nero) to the lowest (other prisoners) **every Believer is commissioned to tell others that Jesus is the Christ.**^{Mat.28:18-20} Paul wrote at least 13 of the 27 books of the NT but we should all write out our testimony of how Jesus has changed our life and share it with others. Paul was martyred and although we may not be called to physically die for our faith, we are called to die to sin and to self: *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness;*^{1Pet.2:24} *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*^{Lk.9:23} The English word “martyr” comes from the Greek word “*martus*” meaning witness: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses (martus) in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*^{Acts.1:8}

Paul’s passion was preaching that **Jesus is the Christ.** *Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus... he reasoned (discoursed) with them about righteousness and self-control and the coming day of judgment.*^{Acts.24:24-25} So, if like Paul we are to prove that **Jesus is the Christ**, what does **Christ** mean? “**Christ**” is transliterated from the Greek word “*christos*” meaning “*anointed*”. The OT equivalent is “*Messiah*” which literally means *anointed* or *smearred with oil*. Kings and priests were “*anointed*” with oil (our Queen was at her Coronation) as a symbol of the Holy Spirit’s power and ability and so they became the “*Lord’s Anointed One*”: *Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.*^{1Sam.15:17}

What evidence is there that Jesus of Nazareth is actually God’s Anointed, Empowered, Promised Redeemer - the Christ (Messiah)? Here are just some of the prophecies about the Messiah which were literally fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth:

He would be human (born of a woman - actually a virgin): *So the LORD God spoke to the serpent. He said, “Because you have done this, “I am putting a curse on you. You are cursed more than all of the livestock and all of the wild animals. You will crawl on the ground. You will eat dust all of the days of your life. I will put hatred between you and the woman. Your children and her children will be enemies. Her son will crush your head. And you will crush his heel.”*^{Gen.3:15} *The LORD himself will give you a miraculous sign. The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel.*^{Is.7:14}

He would be a descendant of Abraham: *I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.*^{Gen.22:17-18} *The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.*^{Gal.3:16}

He would be a descendant of Judah: *The right to rule will not leave Judah. The ruler’s rod will not be taken from between his feet. It will be his until the king it belongs to comes. It will be his until the nations obey him.*^{Gen.49:10}

He would be a descendant of David: *I tell you that I myself will set up a royal house for you. Some day your life will come to an end. You will join the members of your family who have already died. Then I will make one of your own sons the next king after you. And I will make his kingdom secure. He is the one who will build a house where I will put my Name. I will set up the throne of his kingdom. It will last forever. I will be his father. And he will be my son.*^{2Sam.7:11-14}

He would be born in Bethlehem: *Bethlehem, you might not be an important town in the nation of Judah. But out of you will come a ruler over Israel for me. His family line goes back to the early years of your nation.*^{Mic.5:2}

He would leave Egypt: *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*^{Hos.11:1}

He would die on a cross: *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.*^{Ps.22:14-15}

His crucifixion would bring life: *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.*^{Jn.3:15}

His body would not decay in death: *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.*^{Ps.16:9-10}

He would ascend from the Mt of Olives to release the Holy Spirit: *On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley... It will be a unique day—a day known only to the LORD—with no distinction between day and night... On that day living water^{see Jn.7:37-38} will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter.*^{Zech.14:4-8}

He would appear (i.e. begin His ministry) in AD29: *Here is what I want you to know and understand. There will be seven ‘weeks.’ Then there will be 62 ‘weeks.’ The seven ‘weeks’ will begin when an order is given to rebuild Jerusalem and make it like new again. “At the end of the 62 ‘weeks,’ the Anointed King will come.*^{Dan.9:25} Accepting that a “week” represents seven years and the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was given around 455 BC (during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah), a specific period of 483 years (69 x 7) was to elapse before the Messiah would appear, dating Jesus’ Baptism at AD29 (*there is no date of OBC or AD0*).

Although most of these events were shrouded in mystery when first prophesied, they are now very credible parts of the evidence that we have to affirm that **Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ**. Peter had no idea what chapter 2 of Joel meant until it happened and then it all made sense for him.^{Acts.2:16} Paul had no idea what the Scriptures really meant until he had an encounter with the risen Jesus and then it all made sense. Although no evidence is enough to persuade sceptics, even unbelievers can become Believers if they “turn to the Lord.”^{2Cor.3:16} This is not just “pie in the sky when we die” or a “fire insurance” policy to keep us out of hell (although that is the result) – it is also “steak on the plate while we wait”! In other words, there are some very tangible benefits of believing that Jesus is the Christ right now: **peace** with God and with ourselves; contentment with godliness; **clean living** (which is actually a healthier and happier lifestyle); **guaranteed future** after death (instead of wishful thinking and then finding we are wrong); **friends** (real friends who care and support) everywhere in the world.

So if we can prove that Jesus is the Christ, it will motivate us to commit our life to Him and become His personal representative^{Acts.9:15} – **which is costly:** *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.*^{Mk.8:34-38}

However credibly we can prove from Scripture that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the real evidence is our life. Anointing means “**the passion and power to serve God**”. We are not “**Jesusians**” (Jesus means Saviour) because **we are not the Saviour** of the world - we are “**Christians**” because **we carry an Anointing**. We have an anointing from the Holy One... *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you... and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.*^{1Jn.2:20-27}

That’s the real proof that Jesus is the Christ!

Sunday 17th August 2014. Ps.146 Acts 9

How much of a Christian are you?

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.^{2Cor.1:21-22}

Last week we saw that however eloquently we can prove from the Scriptures that **Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ the real proof is our life. We are not “Jesusians”** because we are not the **Saviour** of the world! (*Jesus means Saviour.*^{Mat.1:21}) We are **“Christians”** because we are **Anointed** and followers of the **Anointed One**. **“Anointing”** means **“the passion and power to serve God”** and we have *an anointing from the Holy One... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you... and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.*^{1Jn.2:20-27} **Jesus was anointed:** *You know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus went around doing good. He healed all who were under the devil's power. God was with him.*^{Acts 10:38} **Now it's our time to go around doing good and healing all who were under the devil's power – because God is with us!**

So what does the “Anointing” mean for us in our daily lives? The **“Anointing”** is not to make us feel good or happy (although it does: *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*^{Heb.1:9}) The **“Anointing”** is to equip us to serve God. The **“passion and power to serve God”** is the result of the Holy Spirit's baptism or outflow from our lives: *Jesus cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says.” (He said this in regard to the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were about to receive. The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.)*^{Jn.7:37-39}

Jesus explained that the **“Anointing”** was for preaching: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” ...He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*^{Lk.4:18-21}

Conversion is the Holy Spirit coming into us but the **“Anointing”** is the Holy Spirit coming out of us!

Each of us is commissioned by Jesus to **“preach”** (i.e. to speak to others) **about God** but because *God is Spirit*^{Jn.4:24} we need the Holy Spirit's help to communicate spiritual truths: *And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths.*^{1Cor.2:12-13}

Paul said: *For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.*^{1Cor.2:1-5}

The Gospel is Spiritual and so we must be re-born spiritually or **“born from above”** if we are to be part of God's Family and Kingdom: *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*^{Jn.1:12-13} Jesus answered, *“What I'm about to tell you is true. No one can enter God's kingdom without being born through water and the Holy Spirit. People give birth to people. But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised when I say, ‘You must all be born again.’*^{Jn.3:5-7} *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given*

us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.^{2Pet.1:3-4}

Without this new birth we cannot partake of the spiritual life: *But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.*^{1Cor.2:13}

However the “**Anointing**” is more than preaching – it is also a “seal” or “guarantee” of our eternal life. *Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*^{2Cor.1:21-22}

The new spiritual life that we received at conversion will not end when we die and the Holy Spirit’s “**Anointing**,” - the “**passion and power to serve God**” is our “warranty,” guaranteeing God’s Eternal Presence: *God has said, “I will never leave you. I will never desert you.” So we can say boldly, “The Lord helps me. I will not be afraid. What can a mere man do to me?”*^{Heb.13:5-6}

The “**Anointing**” also strengthens us in the faith and enables us to complete our life victoriously. *To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very end, to them I will give authority over all the nations... They will have the same authority I received from my Father, and I will also give them the morning star! Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.*^{Rev.2:26-29}

At least 12 times the NT exhorts us to “stand firm” especially in our faith because ultimately it is only **faith** that really counts: *And it is impossible to please God without faith.*^{Heb.11:6} *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.*^{1s.7:9}

Brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.^{1Cor.15:58}

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous;^{1Cor.16:13}

It is by faith you stand firm.^{2Cor.1:24}

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.^{Gal.5:1}

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,^{Eph.6:14}

I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.^{Phil.1:27-28}

Stand firm in the Lord in this way dear friends.^{Phil.4:1}

That you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.^{Col.4:12}

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.^{2Thes.2:15}

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.^{Jas.5:8}

By yielding to the “**Anointing**”, we build our trust in God and get established in our faith. As we see God’s Word work in our lives,^{1Thes.2:13} we have more confidence to speak boldly about God, about His Kingdom and about His Promises - but it is up to us to yield to Him, to live for Him and put His word into practise. Although God keeps His promises, it is up to us “redeem” them. Every genuine £20 note has the Bank of England’s “promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of twenty pounds” and is guaranteed by the signature of the Chief Cashier. God’s promises to us are guaranteed by the “**Anointing**” of the Holy Spirit. This should give us greater confidence to act on what God has said than on the Bank of England’s promise to pay us £20.00 but we have to act on the promises and live them out in our daily lives.. *By standing firm you will gain life. (By your patience possess your souls).*^{Lk.21:19}

Let’s re-affirm our Christianity! The “Anointing” - the “passion and power to serve God” is a little fore-taste of heaven and as we continue to use the

“Anointing” we will stand firm in our faith and remain in God, confident of the present and future with Him. *But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.*^{1Jn.2:27}

Sunday 24th August 2014. Ps.147:1-11. Acts 10.

When was the last time God spoke to you?

A *paradox* is a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true. An example of a paradox would be: *All Cretans are liars.*^{Tit.1:12} (Paul is quoting from the philosopher Epimenides [6B.C.] who was a Cretan!). (An *oxymoron* is a figure of speech that uses seeming contradictions, such as “cruel kindness,” “to make haste slowly,” “a little pregnant,” “bitter sweet,” “half true.”) There are other paradoxes in Scripture: *One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.*^{Prov.11:24} *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them,*^{Jn.6:44} *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*^{Matt.11:28}

So, is the phrase: “*God spoke to me*” a paradox? (i.e. a *seemingly* contradictory statement) - or is it *really* a contradictory statement? In other words, **does God actually speak today? And if God does speak today, do we expect Him to speak directly to us?**

God certainly did speak directly to people in the OT and in many different ways: *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees....I get very angry when I see people who aren't faithful to you. They don't obey your word. See how I love your rules! LORD, keep me alive, because you love me. All your words are true. All your laws are right. They last forever.*^{Ps.119:67-68;158-160} The OT says at least 106 times that “*the Word of the Lord came to... saying...*” For example: *After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram... Then the word of the LORD came to him.*^{Gen.15:1-4}

But God now speaks to us by the Living Word through the Written Word: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*^{Heb.1:1-2} *So we must pay more careful attention to what we have heard. Then we will not drift away from it. Even the message God spoke through angels had to be obeyed. Every time people broke the Law, they were punished. Every time they didn't obey, they were punished. Then how will we escape if we don't pay attention to God's great salvation? The Lord first announced that salvation. Those who heard him gave us the message about it. God gave witness to it through signs and wonders. He gave witness through different kinds of miracles. He also gave witness through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He gave them out as it pleased him.*^{Heb.2:1-4 (Also 2Pet.1:16-21)}

However God may also speak to us through visions, dreams, prophecies and even circumstances: *For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it. He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they lie in their beds. He whispers in their ears and terrifies them with warnings. He makes them turn from doing wrong; he keeps them from pride. He protects them from the grave, from crossing over the river of death.*^{Job.33:14-18 (Also Acts.2:17; 1Thes.5:19-22)} **BUT**

God has finished revealing His purposes to us and there has been no new revelation about God or His plans for us since the Scriptures were completed. We believe that the Scriptures are *without error, fully inspired, infallible and the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct.* Although some doctrines were forgotten in the centuries following the earthly ministry of Jesus, when these doctrines were taught again, they were not “*new revelations*” but the original doctrines rediscovered. They were the same doctrines that the Apostles taught in the Early Church and they were the same doctrines that Early Church Fathers wrote about – men like *Justin Martyr* (beheaded in Rome A.D.165) who said that the prophetic gifts remain with us); *Irenaeus* bishop of Lyon, France (A.D. 130–202) who said that those who are in truth Jesus’ Disciples, perform miracles in His Name; *Hilary*

Bishop of Poitiers (A.D. 300–368) who said that the apostles, prophets, etc. *are* the Churches' agents of ministry; *Chrysostom*, Archbishop of Constantinople (A.D. 347–407) who said that the spiritual gifts were not *prolific* due to the backslidden state of the Church (but they still existed). (*Their books, as well as hundreds of other Christian Classics, are available online for free from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library: www.ccel.org.*)

During the Reformation in the 16th when Martin Luther preached **“sola fide” - justification by faith alone** - it was a rediscovery of Biblical teaching. *What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”...The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*^{Rom.4:3,23-25} So also with the other **“Solus”** of the Reformation: **Sola scriptura (Scripture alone** i.e. no teaching of the Church supersedes the authority of the Scriptures); **Sola gratia (by Grace alone)** i.e. there is nothing that we can do to merit our salvation; **Solus Christus (by Christ alone)** i.e. there is no place for any priesthood or sacraments to mediate between us and God; **Soli Deo Gloria (Glory to God alone)** i.e. no-one can claim any credit – all the glory goes to God. These were all a **rediscovery** of the early Church's teaching and written down in the Scriptures. The same was true of **Believer's Baptism** - the Anabaptists did not have a “new revelation” but rediscovered the Biblical teaching of *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*^{Mk.16:16} And the **Pentecostal doctrines of the Holy Spirit** that were rediscovered at the beginning of the 20th are the teachings of the Early Church that had been neglected: *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.... Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.*^{Acts.2:32-39; (Also Eph.5:18-20)} Actually God has always had a remnant of Believers: *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*^{Rom.11:5} (See the Syriac Christians - who still speak the same Aramaic language that Jesus spoke; and the Waldensians which started in Lyon in the late 1170's and spread to the French/Italian Alps.)

So when God speaks to us today, it is always in agreement with Scripture (as interpreted by the New Covenant of sins forgiven through Jesus' blood: *This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*^{Matt.26:28}). God can and does **“illuminate”** Scripture so that it **“comes alive”** or **“jumps out of the page”** and we see a truth for the first time or in a new light **but this is not a “new revelation”** although it may be new for us! In fact if anyone tries to introduce a new teaching (i.e. one that is not found in the NT and taught by the Early Church), we must reject the teaching and the teacher: *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*^{Gal.1:6-9} *But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves. Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.*^{2Pet.2:1-3} *Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people's faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them.*^{Rom.16:17}

However there are times when God does "speak" to us through prophesy or even circumstances but we should never "hang around" waiting to hear from God – that is plain disobedience! But we don't need to hear God audibly speak to us to change our lives or to do something significant for Him – **we just need to listen to what He has already told us to do - and then do it** (see *Mk.16:15-18; Matt.28:18-20*). We need to follow the fundamental, basic disciplines of Christianity that God has given us of **Prayer; Fellowship; Bible study with meditation and memorization; Practicing Christian virtue** (i.e. the fruit of the Spirit^{Gal.5:22-23; 1Cor.13}); **Obedience; Repentance; Worship**. All of these are ordinary, everyday type of things that every one of us can do. Significant, consistent change happens when we apply ourselves over a long period of time and usually we are not even aware of it, like a child growing an inch taller over the course of a year. It's the kind of thing other people reflect to us, but we don't always see ourselves. A prominent psychologist observed: *It is very difficult to change another human being... [People] confuse emotional intensity with significance. What are they doing now that they weren't doing before? The evidence of real change is usually trivial.*

So let's listen for God's voice but make sure that we are already doing what the Living Word has revealed in the Written Word. *To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*^{Rev.2:26-29}

Sunday 31st August 2014. Ps.147:12-20. Acts 11.

Are you are poor dirty sinner or a child of the Living God redeemed by the Blood of Jesus?

Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.^{Acts.11:9}

The first thing we want to do when we find something dirty – toys, tools, food, clothes etc. - is to clean it. If something is dirty it is impure, unwholesome, repulsive or even dangerous. Even though some dirt is useful to stimulate our immune system, none of us would intentionally eat or drink something dirty unless we were really desperate. Few of us like living in dirty conditions and so quite a large part of our life is taken up with cleaning – house, clothes, utensils, food and even our bodies!

But actually there is something that is even more impure, unwholesome, repulsive and dangerous if it is dirty – our soul! When we were converted we were born-again of an incorruptible seed and became righteous. *You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.*^{1Pet.1:23} *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*^{2Cor.5:21} We were re-made clean, healthy and whole: *You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain joined to me, and I will remain joined to you... you can't bear fruit unless you remain joined to me... When you bear a lot of fruit, it brings glory to my Father. It shows that you are my disciples.*^{Jn.15:3-8}

Because God has made us clean (holy) we should make every effort to stay clean (holy). *But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, 'You must be holy because I am holy.'*^{1Pet.1:15-16} *For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus.*^{2Tim.1:9} *And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*^{Rom.12:1-2} *Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene*

stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do. For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, 'Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light.'^{ⓔph.5:3-14}

However if we do get dirty (sin) we only need to wash our "feet" not our whole "body": Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me." Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you."^{ⓙn.13:8-10}

This means that if we sin we won't lose our salvation and need to be re-converted – we can't be born-again-again-again! **Jesus has died once for all time and for all sin.** But Jesus gave one sacrifice for the sins of the people. He gave it once and for all time. He did it by offering himself.^{ⓗeb.7:27} For the death [Jesus] died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.^{ⓚom.6:10-14}

But if we sin we must confess our sins to God and accept His forgiveness. But God is faithful and fair. If we admit that we have sinned, he will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure... But suppose someone does sin. Then we have one who speaks to the Father for us. He stands up for us. He is Jesus Christ, the Blameless One. He gave his life to pay for our sins. But he not only paid for our sins. He also paid for the sins of the whole world.^{ⓙn.1:9-2:2}

Believer's Baptism signifies our new birth by identifying with Jesus' death and resurrection: *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*^{ⓚom.6:3-4}

(Actually I think these verses refer to conversion rather than water baptism.) But Baptism is much more than a "spiritual funeral service" – it is also a "washing" of the soul where we deal with our guilty conscience once and for all: *Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.*^{ⓐct.22:16} and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.^{ⓙet.3:21-22} (Note that it is Jesus' resurrection that saves us, not baptism!)

The OT never dealt with the conscience because the sins were atoned (which means "covered") **but Jesus takes away our sins and clears our conscience:** *Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*^{ⓙn.1:29} For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them. For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established... Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God.^{ⓗeb.9:9-14} **So we must learn to deal with our conscience:** *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence*

whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.^{1Jn.3:18-20}

And then ensure we stay at peace with God and ourselves: Holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.^{1Tim.1:19} They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.^{1Tim.3:9} The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.^{1Tim.4:5}

Holy means **sacred** or **consecrated** i.e. **dedicated to God's use**. Jesus was without sin^{Heb.4:15} and totally dedicated to God's will^{Lk.22:42} and Christians are followers of Christ - He is our Model and Example. So for the Believer there is no sacred/secular divide because our whole life is to be dedicated to God's service, as Jesus' life was: *On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty.*^{Zech.14:20-21} Knowing what the Bible says, or even quoting Bible verses, does not save us^{Jn.5:38-40} - it is the **Word of God** in our heart and mouth that saves us.^{Rom.10:8-10} (The **Word of God** is the **Living Word** and the **Written Word** i.e. **Jesus** and God's revelation of Him in the **Scriptures**.) As we build the truths of God's Word into our life by making our lips do their duty and agreeing with what God says about us and our situation, that we stay holy (clean), whole and happy: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*^{Eph.5:25-27} *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*^{Jn.17:17}

So, do you describe yourself as a poor dirty sinner or a child of the Living God who is redeemed by the Blood of Jesus? *So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*^{Gal.4:7} *Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.*^{Acts.11:9}

Because God has made us clean and expects us to stay clean, let's make sure that we continue to live a clean and holy life by aligning our lives and our lips with God's Word and living for God's honour. This it is not only a better way of life but it is the BEST way of life because we live in God's blessings now and are guaranteed God's blessings forever! *You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honour God with your body.*^{1Cor.6:19-20}

September:

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Col.4:3-4

Sunday 7th September Ps.148

Today is a Family Service and we are looking at “Pilgrim’s Progress”.

Pilgrim’s Progress Background: In the C16th century the *Church of England*, under King Henry VIII, broke away from the authority of the Pope and the *Catholic Church*, and became the established church of the nation. This meant that any other type of Church than the *Church of England* was proscribed. Under *Cromwell* and the *Commonwealth* (1649-1660) the “*Nonconformists*” were given varying amounts of freedom but this was rescinded when *Charles II* was crowned in 1660. The “**Clarendon Code**” was soon introduced which included: **The Corporation Act** (1661) (*rescinded in 1828*) which excluded nonconformists from public office by requiring all municipal officials to take Anglican Communion; **The Act of Uniformity** (1662) (*modified in 1872*) which made the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* compulsory in religious service. Over 2000 clergy refused to comply and so were forced to resign their livings; **The Conventicle Act** (1664) (*repealed in 1689*) which forbade conventicles (*a meeting for unauthorized worship*) of more than five people who were not members of the same household; **The Five Mile Act** (1665) (*repealed by 1689 but not formally abolished until 1812*) which forbade nonconformist ministers from coming within five miles of incorporated towns or to teach in schools.

It was in 1678 under this draconian regime that **John Bunyan** wrote **Pilgrim’s Progress** when he was in prison. He had been arrested and charged thus: “*That John Bunyan, of the town of Bedford, labourer, hath devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to church to hear Divine service, and is a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles, to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord the King.*” Bunyan pleaded: “*We have had many meetings together, both to pray to God, and to exhort one another; and that we had the sweet comforting presence of the Lord among us for our encouragement; blessed be His name therefor! I confess myself guilty no otherwise.*” His sentence was: “*You must be had back again to prison, and lie there for three months following; and, at the three months’ end, if you do not submit, and go to church to hear Divine service, and leave your preaching, you must be banished the realm; and if, after such a day as shall be appointed you to be gone, you shall be found in this realm, you must stretch by the neck for it, I tell you plainly; and so be the justice bid the jailer have him away.*” (So much for our heritage of a “*Christian*” country and British “*freedom*”!)

Pilgrim’s Progress Outline: The frontispiece of the original **Pilgrim’s Progress** included: *The Pilgrim’s Progress from this world to that which is to come delivered under the similitude of a dream. Wherein is discovered the manner of his setting out, his dangerous journey and safe arrival at the desired country. “I have used similitudes”*^{Hosea 12:10} The names of the people and places Bunyan used were chosen carefully as similitudes (allegories) to highlight the dangers and difficulties that a Christian faces on his pilgrimage through life: *I have also spoken unto the prophets, and I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes.*^{Hos.12:10}

Here is a glossary of some of Bunyan’s similitudes:

City of Destruction: The city stands as a symbol of the entire world as it is, with all of its sins, corruptions, and sorrows. No one living there can have any hope of salvation. Convinced that the city is about to be blasted by the wrath of God, *Christian* flees and

sets out alone on a pilgrimage which he hopes will lead him to *Mount Zion*, to the *Celestial City*, where he can enjoy eternal life in the happy company of *God and the Heavenly Host*.

Slough of Despond: A swamp, a bog, a quagmire, the first obstacle in *Christian's* course. Pilgrims are apt to get mired down here by their doubts and fears. After much difficulty and with some providential help, *Christian* finally manages to flounder across the treacherous bog and is on his way again.

Village of Morality: Near the village *Christian* meets *Mr Worldly Wiseman*, who, though not religiously inclined, is a friendly and well-disposed person. He tells *Christian* that it would be foolish of him to continue his pilgrimage, the end of which could only be hunger, pain, and death. *Christian* should be a sensible fellow and settle down in the *Village of Morality*. It would be a good place to raise a family, for living was cheap there and they would have honest, well-behaved people as neighbours — people who lived by the *Ten Commandments*. More than a little tempted by this, *Christian* decides that he should at least have a look at *Morality*. But along the way he is stopped by his friend *Evangelist*, who berates him sharply for having listened to anything *Mr Worldly Wiseman* might have to say. If *Christian* is seriously interested in saving his soul, he would be well advised to get back as quickly as possible on the path to the *Wicket Gate* which *Evangelist* had pointed out to him before.

Wicket Gate: Arriving almost out of breath, *Christian* reads the sign on the gate: "*Knock and it shall be opened unto you.*" He knocks a number of times before arousing the gatekeeper, a "*grave person*" named *Good-will*, who comes out to ask what *Christian* wants. After the latter has explained his mission, he is let through the gate, which opens on the *Holy Way*, a straight and narrow path leading toward the *Celestial City*. *Christian* asks if he can now be relieved of the heavy burden — a sack filled with his sins and woes — that he has been carrying on his back for so long. *Good-will* replies that he cannot help him, but that if all goes well, *Christian* will be freed of his burden in due course.

Interpreter's House: On *Good-will's* advice, *Christian* makes his first stop at the large house of *Interpreter*, a character symbolizing the *Holy Spirit*. *Interpreter* shows his guest a number of "*excellent things.*" These include a portrait of the ideal pastor with the Bible in his hand and a crown of gold on his head; a dusty parlour which is like the human heart before it is cleansed with the Gospel; a sinner in an iron cage, an apostate doomed to suffer the torments of Hell through all eternity; a wall with a fire burning against it. A figure (the devil himself) is busily throwing water on the fire to put it out. But he would never succeed, *Interpreter* explains, because the fire represents the divine spirit in the human heart and a figure on the far side of the wall keeps the fire burning brightly by secretly pouring oil on it — "*the oil of Christ's Grace.*"

The Cross: Beyond *Interpreter's House*, *Christian* comes to the *Cross*, which stands on higher ground beside the *Holy Way*. Below it, at the foot of the gentle slope, is an open sepulchre. When *Christian* stops by the *Cross*, the burden on his back suddenly slips from his shoulders, rolls down the slope, and falls into the open sepulchre, to be seen no more. As *Christian* stands weeping with joy, three *Shining Ones* (angels) appear. They tell him all his sins are now forgiven, give him bright new raiment to replace his old ragged clothes, and hand him a parchment, "*a Roll with a seal upon it.*" For his edification and instruction, *Christian* is to read the *Roll* as he goes along, and when he reaches the *Pearly Gates*, he is to present it as his credentials a sort of passport to Heaven, as it were.

After the **Cross**, **Christian** still has a life of difficulties (mostly from making the wrong choices) but by perseverance and encouragement of others, he eventually makes his destination and enters the **Celestial City**. **The big question is: Will you enter the Celestial City?**

Pilgrim's Progress Conclusion

Now, reader, I have told my dream to thee,
See if thou canst interpret it to me,
Or to thyself, or neighbour: but take heed
Of misinterpreting; for that, instead
Of doing good, will but thyself abuse:
By misinterpreting, evil ensues.
Take heed, also, that thou be not extreme
In playing with the outside of my dream;
Nor let my figure or similitude
Put thee into a laughter, or a feud.
Leave this for boys and fools; but as for thee,
Do thou the substance of my matter see.
Put by the curtains, look within my veil,
Turn up my metaphors, and do not fail.
There, if thou seekest them, such things thou'lt find
As will be helpful to an honest mind.
What of my dross thou findest there, be bold
To throw away, but yet preserve the gold.
What if my gold be wrapped up in ore?
None throw away the apple for the core:
But if thou shalt cast all away as vain,
I know not but 'twill make me dream again.

John Bunyan

Sunday 14th September 2014. Ps.142. Acts 12

Have you walked out of your prison yet? Acts.12:9

A prison is a place of confinement where freedom is forfeited. There many sorts of "prisons" that can incarcerate us besides the edifices of state gaols built to detain criminals or prisoners-of-war. There are "prisons" of tradition, culture, family expectation, addiction and guilt but perhaps the most oppressive and powerful "prison" is sin. Actually sin is the universal problem that mankind faces and struggles with – all other difficulties stem from that. Sin is everything that opposes God, or is less than His glory (perfect standard): *For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.*^{Rom.3:23} *Everything that is not based on faith is sin.*^{Rom.14:23} This struggle with sin appeared at the beginning of time and has continued through all of human history right up to now: *The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected. "Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."*^{Gen.4:4-7}

It is very significant that Jesus began His ministry by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2 because the Gospel is about life and liberty from sin: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He has anointed me to tell the good news to poor people. He has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners. He has sent me so that the blind will see again. He wants me to free those who are beaten down. And he has sent me to announce the year when he will set his people free.*^{Lk.4:18} Jesus then went to say: *Today this passage of Scripture is coming true as you listen.*^{Lk.4:21} This transition from spiritual death and slavery to spiritual life and liberty was prefigured by the Exodus when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. And this is what Moses was talking to Jesus about on the Mt of Transfiguration: *As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as*

bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, [Greek: exodos] which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem.^{Lk.9:29-31}

Although we were actually born prisoners and slaves to sin (which is why we must be born-again), God has redeemed us: *But God loves us deeply. He is full of mercy. So he gave us new life because of what Christ has done. He gave us life even when we were dead in sin. God's grace has saved you.*^{Eph.2:4-5} But because we died and then rose to new life with Christ, we are free from the control and dominion of the old life of sin: *Now, dear brothers and sisters—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that the law applies only while a person is living? For example, when a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries. So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.*^{Rom.7:1-6}

This dying was a once-for-all-event at conversion not a daily experience. We *“have been crucified”* not *“are being crucified”*: *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*^{Gal.2:20} When Paul talked about dying daily he was referring to physical danger not to dying to his old life: *Why too are we in danger every hour? Every day I am in danger of death!*^{1Cor.15:30-31} We must establish this in our thinking and our emotions if we are to live in the blessings and benefits of God's Kingdom: *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*^{2Cor.13:5}

Believers really are God's children – now! But sadly too many Christians still think of themselves as slaves rather than sons and then they live as slaves not sons: *I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever.*^{Jn.8:34-35} *Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world.*^{Gal.4:1-3} Christ has set us free and it is an insult to God if we revert back to our old way of thinking and living: *Before you knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world?*^{Gal.4:8-12} *So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.*^{Gal.5:1}

The key that unlocks the prison of sin is FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST: *But Scripture announces that the whole world is a prisoner because of sin. It does so in order that what was promised might be given to those who believe. The promise comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Before faith in Christ came, we were held prisoners by the law. We were locked up until faith was made known. So the law was put in charge until Christ came. He came so that we might be made right with God by believing in Christ. But now faith in Christ has come. So we are no longer under the control of the law. You are all children of God by believing in Christ Jesus.*^{Gal.3:22-26} Faith in Jesus Christ also unlocks the “prison” of tradition, culture, family expectation, addiction and guilt as well as sin. When

Paul & Silas were in prison they didn't sulk, complain or get downhearted but *prayed and sang hymns of praise to God.*^{Acts 16:25} Praise is not describing our problems or even asking God to help us but a *eulogy* (literally: *good words*) – it is speaking well of God. *Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising [eulogeo] God.*^{Lk. 1:64} Here are some more examples of speaking well of God: *The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."*^{Lk. 23:47} *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles;*^{2Cor. 1:3-4} *You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.*^{Ps. 118:28-29} *My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.*^{Lk. 1:46-49}

As Paul & Silas sang praises to God, their chains fell off!^{Acts 16:25-26} This is an allegory for us - instead of worrying about our "prison" we should praise God and walk free from it and all its restraints. The Gospel is about freedom which Jesus procured for us at Calvary. We cannot buy this freedom because the price is too high **BUT** we can receive it as a gift. Praise shows that we have accepted God's gift with gratitude and we have believed what He has said. **Yes, praise will always displace despair.** *He brought me out of prison that I might praise His name.*^{Ps. 142:7} If Jesus had kept reading from Isaiah, He would have said: *to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.*^{Is. 61:3} **Let's act on God's Word and say with Jesus: Today this passage of Scripture is coming true for us as we listen.**^{Lk. 4:21}

Sunday 21st September 2014. Ps.149 Acts 13

Do you have a clear direction and purpose in your life? If so, what are you doing?

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.^{1Pet. 1:18-19} Paul and Barnabas were among the prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch when the Holy Spirit said: *commission them for the work I have called them to do.*^{Acts 13:2} And their work was *to proclaim the word of God.*^{Acts 13:5}

The purpose of *prophets, pastors and teachers* is to equip God's people to do the work of *proclaiming the Word of God* and help them become mature: *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*^{Eph. 4:11-13} It is obvious that not everyone is responsible for teaching in the Church, **BUT we are ALL responsible to edify, exhort and encourage others:** *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way... Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy... he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and encouragement to men.*^{1Cor. 12:27-31; 14:1-3}

Although the Church is to *"equip his people for works of service"*^{Eph. 4:11} it doesn't mean that we have to be "experts" in theology in order to do the work of *"edifying, exhorting and encouraging"* others. We are a "Free Church" (i.e. we encourage people to participate in public praise, prayer and prophesy but don't follow a liturgical order of Service) but our activities are *"deliberate"* – they are planned in order to encourage and inspire people to *reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the*

whole measure of the fullness of Christ.^{Eph.4:11-13} Our “**equipping**” is by “**example**” and “**exercise**” not by taking “**exams**” and as we make a habit of “**edifying, exhorting and encouraging**” others in our Services we will do the same in the rest of our life – at home, at work and at play! (A “*habit*” is something that we do automatically - without thinking.) “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?”^{Acts.8:30-31} They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.^{Neh.8:8}

By studying the Scriptures we become qualified to explain to others what God has said: *Get the word out. Teach all these things. And don't let anyone put you down because you're young. Teach believers with your life: by word, by demeanour, by love, by faith, by integrity.*^{1Tim.4:11-12} *Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.*^{2Tim.2:15}

You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.^{2Tim.2:2} And as we acknowledge what God has given us, we become more effective: *that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*

These “**good things in us**” include: the **Holy Spirit**: *Don't you know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is in you.*^{1Cor.6:19}; a **new spirit from God (that is holy)**: *I will give you new hearts. I will give you a new spirit that is faithful to me. I will remove your stubborn hearts from you. I will give you hearts that obey me.*^{Ezek.35:26} *You were born from a seed that can't die.*^{1Pet.1:23}; the **Rule of Christ** (i.e. the **Kingdom of God**). This **Kingdom** is the **King's Dominion** within us – how we accept **God's authority**: *the kingdom of God is within you.*^{Lk.17:21} But it is as much about **God's Attitudes (Values)** as **His Authority**: *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*^{Rom.14:17}

Jesus taught a lot about **attitudes** especially in His “**Sermon on the Mount**” also called “**The Beatitudes**” (beautiful-attitudes): *God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven.*^{Matt.5:3-12} These “**attitudes of God**” are also called

“**fruit of the Spirit**” because they result from the life of the Holy Spirit within us: *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things.*^{Gal.4:22-23}

The Christianity that we proclaim, live and love is a “miracle religion” - it is “100% supernatural – God possessing man.”^{J.G.Lake} **God does answer prayer and He does heal** (which is why Jesus gave the Disciples a “**PhD degree**” (preach, heal and deliver!) **in Theology**: *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick... So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.*^{Lk.9:1-6} *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*^{Mk.16:20} T.L.Osborn said that “each miracle healing becomes undeniable proof that the Gospel is indeed true!” However signs and wonders confirm the Word not replace it, **because faith comes from hearing the Word** (So faith comes from hearing the message. And the message that is heard is the word of Christ,^{Rom.10:17}) **not from seeing miracles or wonders**: *Isaiah asked what we all ask at one*

time or another: "Does anyone care, God? Is anyone listening and believing a word of it?" The point is, Before you trust, you have to listen. But unless Christ's Word is preached, there's nothing to listen to. ^{Rom.10:16-17} So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders ^{Acts.14:3} Notice that it was Paul's teaching about Jesus that impacted people rather than the signs and wonders: When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. ^{Acts.13:12} When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ^{Acts.13:48-49}

When Jesus was tired, it was talking to the woman about faith that refreshed Him - not a holiday or even food! In fact **Jesus said that His food was doing God's work:** *I have food to eat that you know nothing about... My food is to do what my Father sent me to do. My food is to finish his work.* ^{Jn.4:32-34} **Jesus also said that our work (i.e. our food) is to believe in Him:** *Do not work for food that spoils. Work for food that lasts forever. That is the food the Son of Man will give you. God the Father has put his seal of approval on him.* Then they asked him, "What does God want from us? What works does he want us to do?" Jesus answered, "God's work is to believe in the One he has sent." ^{Jn.6:27-29} "A truth not practised is a truth not believed" - if we don't speak about what we say we believe, and act on it, we don't really believe it! *Just as a person's body that does not have a spirit is dead, so faith that does nothing is dead!* ^{1as.2:26}

Yes God has given us a clear direction and purpose in our life because we have been **redeemed from an empty (meandering) way of life.** ^{1Pet.1:18-19} **So let's take Jesus' commission seriously and** *Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.* ^{Matt.28:19-20} **But let's also keep practicing in the Church as well!** *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.* ^{Col.3:16}

Sunday 28th September 2014. Ps.150. Acts 14 Margaret Fermor
Work in Progress.

Pilgrim's Progress is a story of religion, relationship and response. We could also say it is about learning, knowing and wisdom.

There is a **progression** in the story – hence **Pilgrim's Progress**, and we all have to start somewhere. Learning is good, but just learning about Jesus is not enough. *Christian* in the story was reading the bible. He had learnt about the destruction that was to come but that just left him frightened and conscious of his sin - that was becoming a burden so huge he could hardly bear it. That is what religion on its own does. Learning is about accumulating information. Information without understanding can be dangerous.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven... Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' ...But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ^{Matt.7:21-26}

If we only read the words and don't put them into practise we are like the foolish man who built his house on sand. We won't stand in time of trouble. Foolish builders read the book, quote it and even name names, **but Jesus "didn't know them."** *Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.* ^{2Pet.3:16-18} *Christian's problem could be ours. Don't be led down the wrong path, but grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – **Progress!***

If I took time and read all the works of Shakespeare, I could join a drama group and perform his plays. I studied *Romeo and Juliet* for my English G.C.E. and I can still quote part of the balcony scene. I can learn his work and perform or act it but I don't know Shakespeare, the author, the person. Some can be like that with Jesus, *the Author and Perfecter of our faith*. One can read the Bible and learn some significant scriptures and appear quite spiritual but not know Jesus and not be known by Him. *Christian* was reading the book but it wasn't until he got to the cross that he met with the risen Jesus. At the empty tomb and empty cross his burden of sin rolled away, never to be seen again. His eyes were opened. He knew the Truth and the Truth set him free.^{John8:32} **He had progressed from just learning to knowing.**

We can know and share in this previously impossible relationship with God through Jesus his Son - *the fellowship of believers*. *We have heard, seen with our eyes, looked at and our hands have touched.*^{1Jn.1:1-10} What John experienced, we too can know and experience.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.^{Phil.1:9-11}

Paul wrote to the church that their *love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight*. He them to know Jesus more and more deeply. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road,^{Acts 9} became literally an eye opening experience. He must have sung: *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but know am found, was blind but know I see.* **We must all have that personal encounter with Jesus.** It may not be as dramatic as it was for Paul, but it will be life changing and real.

When Paul was beaten and left for dead he got up and **the next day** left for Derbe and continued preaching, strengthening and encouraging the disciples to stay in the faith.^{Acts.14:15-22} He didn't take a 6 month sabbatical to recover or to seek God that he was doing the right thing. No, he got right back to doing what he was doing.

I wonder what the disciples said when they were gathered around Paul, beaten, bleeding and looking as though he was dead. "*We knew this would happen, we told him to water down the message - he always was a hothead.*" No I'm sure they didn't. They had lived and worked with Paul, who had encountered Jesus face to face. Their fellowship was with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

But what would you say? If Marc was there he would say: *God is good, a refuge in time of trouble, he cares for those who trust in Him.*^{Nahum 1:7} Jean would say: *I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of all the good things you have in Christ Jesus.*^{Phil.6} (That is what Paul wrote and he would have taught it everywhere he went.) Ed would say, *God is good.* **What would you say? What rises up in you and comes out of your mouth in time of trouble.** What we say should bring life, restoration and the light of the gospel. **Speak words of faith, courage and love** and you will grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. You will have a full understanding of every good thing you have in Christ Jesus.

There is a saying, "*the older you get the more you know but the less you understand.*" It probably holds some truth in this age of technology. But the Bible says that we should: *Get wisdom, get understanding.*^{Prov.4:5} *It is much better to get wisdom than gold. It is much better to get understanding than silver.*^{Prov.16:16} This wisdom is not to do with a great intellectual education. It is applying the knowledge we have of Jesus to our everyday life. It is about our attitude and actions. It is our response to the love God has for us. *Add to your knowledge, self-control, perseverance godliness and brotherly kindness.*^{2Pet.1:3-11} Apply them liberally to your life. The aroma of your favourite perfume or cologne, when applied liberally, will be with you everywhere you go. Our attitudes and actions should be like that sweet aroma. You can

talk to someone all day long about Jesus but if you don't have a good attitude, you'll not smell so good. What did we read? *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*^{2Pet.1:3-11}

Our memory text for September is: *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*^{Col.4:2-6} **Be wise in the way you act.** *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*^{Eph.5:15-21} **Be careful how you live. Be wise.**

To sum up. We start with learning about God – but if that is all we do, it will become a dead religion and will actually cause us more problems than solve them. Life comes when we come into that wonderful relationship with God through Jesus by his cross and resurrection. When we can say, *'I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able!* **And then our response to that knowledge is to live wisely.** Remember the wise builder built his house on the rock. So when trouble comes, and it will come, we will stand firm, to the glory of God the Father. **So grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

October:

May God strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones. 1Thes.3:13

Sunday 5th October 2014. Ps.1

Dave Smethurst is speaking today, so I have used this article from Greg Koukl's "Any Old God Won't Do" (www.str.org)

How to Choose a Religion

Ice cream or insulin? Forgive me for stating something obvious but there is a big difference between choosing an *ice cream flavour* and choosing a *medicine*. When choosing *ice cream* you can **choose what you like**. When choosing *medicine* you must **choose what heals**. But there is profound confusion on this point when it comes to religion. Too many people think of God like "*ice cream*" and not like "*insulin*." They seem to choose religious views according to **tastes**, not according to **truth**; to *satisfy a subjective taste* and not *solve an objective problem*.

Certain facts about religion, just like certain facts about medicine, are absolutely critical. You'd never say, "*The doctor prescribed Chemotherapy, but I use chocolate syrup. It tastes better!*" Don't look for a religion **that you like**. Look for the religion **that is true**. This is critical because *just believing* something **doesn't alter the structure of reality**. But how do we know which religion is true and which is false? It's not as difficult as you think – we are actually subconsciously testing true or false claims every day... is the water too hot? Is the food healthy? Is it safe to cross the road? Do my clothes fit? Etc. etc.

So how do we test truth claims? What kind of evidence would count as a good reason to believe in anything? We draw conclusions about the truth of the world principally in three ways: **First**, discovery by **reflection**: What comports with reason? Some things just can't be so. (I.e. if I said "*I have a square circle down in my car*" you would not be tempted to take a look because you cannot have a *square circle* - it is a contradiction in terms.) **Second**, discovery by **observation**: What fits the world as we know it to be (i.e. if you asked me why I was late and I said "*I got held up by a herd of elephants*" you know that there are no elephant herds around here, therefore my excuse was false!) **Third**, discovery by **authority**: What is a reliable source of information (i.e. someone that you trust has researched the information and is also normally confirmed by other trusted sources.) These three elements give us a clue about what steps we can take to see if a claim is true or not. **We reject ideas that are contradictory; that don't fit the evidence; that come from a source that can't be trusted. We accept ideas that are coherent; that fit the evidence; that come from a trustworthy authority.**

Now, some things may seem odd to us or inscrutable that aren't actually incoherent, that is, contradictory. Some people object that the Trinity is irrational: "*You can't have three Gods in one God.*" You're right. But the **Trinity is three Persons in one God. That's different**. This may be strange and difficult to comprehend (like a computer), but it's not irrational or contradictory. **Religions have contradictory claims, therefore all religions can't be true**. For instance: God can't be personal and not personal at the same time, if you mean the same thing by "*personal*" in each case; When you die you can't go to Heaven or Hell and be reincarnated at the very same time; Either Jesus is the Messiah (Christian view) or He's not (Jewish view) - one of these views must be wrong but both can't be correct. Further, to say all religions are basically the same because they share some common elements is like saying that *aspirin* and *arsenic* are *basically the same because they come in tablet form*. It is the **differences that are critical**. Therefor the *religious stew* view of "*all religions lead to God*" must be false, according to this test.

Jesus as Authority. The identity of Jesus is the central issue of Christianity. In this regard Jesus is absolutely unique. The Christian faith is founded on a person, not a teaching (as in other religions). In some ways Jesus' teaching is not especially unique as most of it is found in the Old Testament and some is also in other religions. BUT Jesus drew attention to **Himself**, not to His teaching (*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*^{Matt.1:15}) Most religious leaders minimize themselves and then their disciples deify them.

Jesus **affirmed His own divinity** and then His disciples left Him. **The decision you make about His identity (not His teaching) will determine, according to Jesus, where you will spend eternity** (*Unless you believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins.*^{Jn.8:24})

Jesus was executed not for what He taught but for **who He said He was**. (Note His trial: *The high priest said to him, "I command you under oath by the living God. Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."* "Yes. It is just as you say," Jesus replied... *Then the high priest tore his clothes. He said, "He has spoken a very evil thing against God! Why do we need any more witnesses? You have heard him say this evil thing. What do you think?"* "He must die!" they answered.^{Matt.26:63-66})

An historical, flesh-and-blood Jesus, who lived and died and rose from the dead is the necessary foundation of Christianity. Jesus made many profound claims for Himself, the kind of claims that would seem insufferably arrogant had others said them. **But His greatest claim was that He was God in the flesh and the only way to salvation: I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.**^{Jn.14:6}

So What? We have useful guidelines that can actually help us answer the question:

What religion is true? Anyone searching for truth must ask some very important questions: **1.** When you search for the true religion you want to ask, "**Does it make sense, or is it contradictory in some way?**" **2.** When you search for the true religion you want to ask, "**Does it fit the world the way it really is?**" **3.** When you search for the true religion you want to ask, "**Is it based on a reliable authority?**"

Clearly, "religious stew" is false because all religions simply are not the same. Jesus taught one God that was Triune, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Islam* teaches there is only one God, but He can't have a son. *Confucius* taught polytheism. *Krishna* taught a mixture of polytheism and pantheism. *Zoroastrianism* teaches God is a duality of good and evil (the "Force" of *Star Wars*). *Buddha* said the issue of God was irrelevant. **Don't take refuge in an empty slogan: All roads lead to Rome, as long as you're sincere. That's simply foolish.** This is too important an issue to trust to faulty slogans. Don't pat yourself on the back for being religious. **G-O-D** doesn't solve anything. Jesus made it clear that there will be a day of reckoning and "*He's making a list and checking it twice.*" *And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*^{Rev.20:11}

Let me put it simply. If Jesus is right: one day you will stand before God in judgment on your life. Jesus said every idle word you speak, you will give account of in that day.^{Matt.12:36}

You will be found guilty. I suspect you already know that. When that time comes for you—and it will come—any old God won't do. Only one thing will save you from the punishment of the lake of fire when the gavel falls is the true God... **the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Sunday 12th October 2014. Ps.2. Acts 14

Appreciation or Adulation?

How can we receive appreciation without it becoming adulation and accept praise without it turning to pride? *When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted, "These men are gods in human form!" ...But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard what was happening, they tore their clothing in dismay and ran out among the people, shouting, "Friends, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings—just like you! We have come to bring you the Good News that you should turn from these worthless things and turn to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them."*^{Acts 14:11-15}

Praise is one of the basics of “*people management*” and we all like (and need) to be appreciated. People who feel valued are happier, healthier and harder working than those who don’t feel valued and a little praise goes a long way, whether it is at work or at home, teaching or parenting, adults or children. But when appreciation becomes adulation, it is not only misguided it is also plain wrong – it is sin! Some of the problem with *mass media* is that it is easy to get a *mass following* which can lead to *manipulation*. Masses are easy to influence and those caught up in large crowds find it very difficult to “*swim against the tide*”. This was especially seen in the 1970’s with the Trade Unions who brought our county to a standstill. We need to be able think for ourselves without being manipulated by others. *So put on all of God's armour. Evil days will come. But you will be able to stand up to anything. And after you have done everything you can, you will still be standing. So stand firm... And take the sword of the Holy Spirit. The sword is God's word. At all times, pray by the power of the Spirit. Pray all kinds of prayers. Be watchful, so that you can pray. Always keep on praying for all of God's people.*^{Eph.6:13-18}

Dictators thrive on adulation and pro-actively promote it, with the Cæsars demanding the greeting: “*hail Cæsar*” and Hitler with “*heil Hitler*”. This adulation is in direct contrast to the clear teaching of Jesus who said that we should not honour any person beyond their humanity: *Everything they do is done for others to see. On their foreheads and arms they wear little boxes that hold Scripture verses. They make the boxes very wide. And they make the tassels on their coats very long. They love to sit down in the place of honour at dinners. They also love to have the most important seats in the synagogues. They love to be greeted in the market places. They love it when people call them ‘Rabbi.’ But you shouldn't be called ‘Rabbi.’ You have only one Master, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth ‘father.’ You have one Father, and he is in heaven. You shouldn't be called ‘teacher.’ You have one Teacher, and he is the Christ. The most important person among you will be your servant. Anyone who lifts himself up will be brought down. And anyone who is brought down will be lifted up.*^{Matt.23:5-12} Obviously a father is a father and a teacher is a teacher and if we called them anything else it would only be playing with words but Jesus was teaching us that we shouldn’t honour people above their humanity. The Bible clearly teaches that we should respect everybody including honouring those with social and civil responsibility. *Fear the LORD and the king, my son, and do not join with rebellious officials.*^{Prov.24:30} *Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and give to God the things that are God's.*^{Matt.22:21} *Live as servants of God. Show respect for all people: Love the brothers and sisters of God's family, respect God, honour the king.*^{1Pet.2:16-17} *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only*

because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honor.^{Rom.13:1-7} Kings like to throw their weight around and people in authority like to give themselves fancy titles. It's not going to be that way with you. Let the senior among you become like the junior; let the leader act the part of the servant.^{Lk.22:25-26}

Christians should be the best citizens and the most loyal citizens but God's Kingdom will always take precedence over our national loyalty and God's praise will always take priority over man's praise: They would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.^{Jn.12:42-43} Once again the leaders called in Peter and John. They commanded them not to speak or teach at all in Jesus' name. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves. Which is right from God's point of view? Should we obey you? Or God? There's nothing else we can do. We have to speak about the things we've seen and heard."^{Acts.4:18-20} But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority..."^{Acts.5:29}

To receive appreciation without letting it become adulation, let's start by showing our appreciation of others freely and generously. Generosity is the core value of Christianity because God is a generous God: He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour.^{Tit.3:5-6} God gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.^{Jas.1:5}

Here are some Bible verses that show the benefits of generosity: Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the LORD your God will bless you in everything you do.^{Deut.15:10} The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.^{Ps.37:21} The godly always give generous loans to others, and their children are a blessing.^{Ps.37:26} Light shines in the darkness for the godly. They are generous, compassionate, and righteous. Good comes to those who lend money generously and conduct their business fairly.^{Ps.112:4-5} A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.^{Prov.11:25} Blessed are those who are generous.^{Prov.22:9} But generous people plan to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity.^{Is.32:8} Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously... Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.^{2Cor.9:6-11}

Receiving (and giving) adulation is really pride - and God does not tolerate pride: whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, I will not tolerate.^{Ps.101:5} God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.^{1Pet.5:5} Agree with each other. Don't be proud. Be willing to be a friend of people who aren't considered important. Don't think that you are better than others. Don't pay back evil with evil. Be careful to do what everyone thinks is right. If possible, live in peace with everyone. Do that as much as you can.^{Rom.12:16-18} (Actually pride was the original sin of Lucifer: You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you... You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you... I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you... All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.^{Ezek.28:13-19})

If we genuinely show our appreciation of others, it will be easy to receive appreciation from others. But remember, we are all accountable to God and so it is in our own interest to do what is right without becoming proud. God will call the past to account.^{Ecc.3:15} Does he not see my ways and count my every step? ...What will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account?^{Job.31:4/14} On judgment day, people will have to account for every careless word they have spoken. By your words you will be found guilty or not

guilty.^{Matt.12:36-7} So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.^{Rom.14:12} Nothing God created is hidden from him. His eyes see everything. He will hold us accountable for everything we do.^{Heb.4:13}

Let's be generous in our appreciation but stay humble in our attitude and ensure that all honour goes to Jesus. Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to him who alone is God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.^{Jude 24-25}

Sunday 19th October 2014. Ps.3. Acts 15

Let's go Camping!

After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent.^{Acts.15:16}

God instructed Moses to build a Tent to house the Ark of the Covenant and said that He would meet with him there: *Have them make a sacred tent for me. I will live among them. Make the holy tent and everything that belongs to it. Make them exactly like the pattern I will show you. Have them make a chest out of acacia wood. Make it 45 inches long and 27 inches wide and high. Cover it inside and outside with pure gold...I will give you the tablets of the covenant. When I do, put them into the chest. Make its cover out of pure gold. The cover is the place where sin will be paid for... Put one cherub on each end of it. Make the cherubim as part of the cover itself... I will meet with you above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark. There I will give you all of my commands for the people of Israel.*^{Ex.25:8-30}

When the Israelites inhabited the Promised Land they did not have a permanent place for God's Tent and it ended up in Shiloh, Samaria^{Josh.18:1} until David brought it to Jerusalem.^{2Sam.6} Here David dedicated the Tent to worshipping God with **Praise, Payer and Prophecy**: *The ark of God was ...put in the tent David had set up for it... David wanted them to pray, give thanks and praise the LORD.*^{1Chron.16:14} *David ...set them apart to serve the LORD by prophesying while harps, lyres and cymbals were being played.*^{1Chron.25:1}

David had wanted to build a magnificent Temple where he could worship God (even though God did not need or want a static building,^{2Sam.8-16} but the Prophet Nathan told David that it would be one of his descendants who would build the Temple.^{1Chron.17:11-14}

Although David's son Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, the prophecy referred to "King David's greater son" **Jesus** and the **Temple** He is building is **you and me**: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*^{1Cor.6:19} *Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.*^{2Cor.5:1} **We are the "house of prayer"** that Jesus spoke of: *'My house will be a house of prayer' but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'*^{Lk.19:46}

We are to Pray continually.^{1Thes.5:17} **We are to Praise continually:** *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.*^{Heb.13:15} **We are to Prophecy:** *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy*^{1Cor.14:1} but remember, **Prophecy** is giving testimony about Jesus: *Worship only God!*^{Rev.19:10} *For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.*

Prayer: Prayer is not a "shopping list" of "please bless me's"! The lowest level of Christianity is to be blessed because every Believer has **already** been abundantly blessed: *Give praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ.*^{Eph.1:3} **The highest level of Christianity is to be a blessing.** God says: *I will bless you. I will make your name great.* **You will be a blessing to others.**^{Gen.12:2} Prayer is fellowshiping with the Father, aligning our thoughts and dreams with His, then listening to the response and guidance of His Word and of His Spirit. Prayer is interceding for the needs of fellow-believers, then listening for God's ideas of what we can do about them - of ways we can

be part of the answer. Prayer is never pleading or begging for divine favours (see T.L.Osborn's [The Winning Secret](#) available from our website). That is why Jude writes: *Dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith. Let the Holy Spirit guide and help you when you pray.*^{Jude 1:19-20}

Praise: Hymns and spiritual songs are an important part of the encouragement, edifying and establishing of our faith. Most people's Theology (what they believe about God) is formed by the songs they sing, so it is imperative that we sing the Truth and not sentimental, emotional lyrics that have little relevance to New Covenant Truth. Elizabeth Pruitt Sloan says: *"Much of today's Christian songs don't do anything for me. They have no tune, no melody, and no anointing. But give me some of the old songs, or new ones that exalt the Blood of Jesus, and my spirit just soars!"* This has led Mel Montgomery to add *Songs of Inspiration* to his website (www.brothermel.org) so we can (re)learn some of the good old and new hymns. Our praise will be passionate when we express our *worth-ship* of God!

Prophecy: this is not spiritual insight into other people's lives (although this may occur) but simply the testimony of Jesus: *For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (What Jesus taught is the very heart of prophecy.*^{NIRV)Rev.19:10} As we testify about Jesus (especially from the Scriptures) we find that have the same experience as the 1st Disciples: *They said to each other, "He talked with us on the road. He opened the Scriptures to us. Weren't our hearts burning inside us during that time?"*^{Lk.24:32} Sharing Jesus from the Scriptures leads to **Revelation and Instructions** *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*^{Rom15:4}

Tongues and interpretation are also some of the tools that God has given to the Church but are not my usual gifting – are they yours? **Whatever our gifting we should be eager to use it** *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.*^{1Cor.14:39-40}

Let's make it our intention to encourage someone each day and especially when we meet as Church so that we each *prepare God's people to serve. [Then] the body of Christ will be built up. That will continue until we all become one in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son. Then we will be grown up in the faith. We will receive everything that Christ has for us. We will no longer be babies in the faith. We won't be like ships tossed around by the waves. We won't be blown here and there by every new teaching. We won't be blown around by the cleverness and tricks of people who try to hide their evil plans. Instead, we will speak the truth in love. We will grow up into Christ in every way. He is the Head. He makes the whole body grow and build itself up in love. Under the control of Christ, each part of the body does its work. It supports the other parts. In that way, the body is joined and held together.*^{Eph.4:12-16}

Remember that we are the Temple that Jesus is building so let us each keep our life a **House of Prayer where Jesus is Praised and Proclaimed as the Son of God.** Our body is called a "tent" because it is **temporary** (*So I will always remind you of these things. I'll do it even though you know them. I'll do it even though you now have deep roots in the truth. I think it is right for me to remind you. It is right as long as I live in this tent. I'm talking about my body. I know my tent will soon be removed. Our Lord Jesus Christ has made that clear to me. I hope that you will always be able to remember these things after I'm gone. I will try very hard to see that you do.*^{2Pet.1:12-15}) But God's residency in us is **Permanent:** *For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*^{2Cor.6:16} *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."*^{Rev.21:3} *God has said, "I will never leave you. I will never desert you."* So we can say boldly, *"The Lord helps me. I will not be afraid. What can a mere man do to me?"*^{Heb.13:5-6}

Yes God is rebuilding David's fallen tent and restoring the true worship of spirit & truth – so let's live like it!

Sunday 26th October 2014. Ps.4. Acts 16

Two Covenants but One Testament.

The Bible is comprised of **Two Covenants** but **One Testament**. The first 39 books of the Bible focuses on the **Old Covenant** as God unfolded His revelation of Salvation through Israel. The remaining 27 books of the Bible show that the Jesus Christ is the culmination of Israel and fulfilment of all the laws, rituals and ceremonies contained in the **Old Covenant** (in the same way that an object before the sunshine fulfils its shadows): *The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves.*^{Heb.10:1} *So do not let anyone make rules for you about eating and drinking or about a religious feast, a New Moon Festival, or a Sabbath day. These things were like a shadow of what was to come. But what is true and real has come and is found in Christ.*^{Col.2:16-17} So when Jesus introduced the **New Covenant**, the **Old Covenant** became obsolete: *This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*^{Lk.22:20} *By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.*^{Heb.8:13}

The **Old Covenant** was given through Moses at Sinai at the 1st Pentecost (50 days after Passover). The **New Covenant** was also given at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and birthed the Church.^{Acts.2} The **Old Covenant** was written on tablets of stone but the **New Covenant** is written on our hearts: *You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*^{2Cor.2:3} The **Old Covenant** resulted in 3000 people dying^{Ex.32:28} but the **New Covenant** resulted in 3000 people being saved: *Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*^{Acts.2:41} *He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*^{2Cor.3:6} Pentecost was also the beginning of the harvest,^{Lev.23:15} that continued until the Feast of Tabernacles,^{Lev.23:39} during which Israel lived in “booths” or tents for 7 days before returning to their “permanent” home, which illustrates the **New Covenant** era where it is spiritual “harvest time”: *You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest.*^{Jn.4:35-39} The **New Covenant** era will conclude when we receive our “permanent” home of our immortal body.^{1Cor.15:50-56}

The **Old Covenant** contained (1) Moral laws (*summed up by the Ten Commandments which served as types of category headers for these Moral Laws*), (2) Food laws (*which had dietary benefits and established an ethnically distinct cuisine*), (3) Ceremonial laws (*which governed the religious observances*), and (4) Civil laws (*which regulated Israel's public policies and determined the civic penalties for violating any of the laws*). The **New Covenant** reiterates all of the Ten Commandments but explains that the 4th Command, *Keep the Sabbath day holy*, was a shadow of the “rest” achieved by the work of Christ.^{Heb.4} [Those who fail to grasp how the **New Covenant** casts its shadow through **Old Covenant** fail to understand why Israel's **Old Covenant** civil penalties - such as stoning to death - do not apply in today's **New Covenant** era.]

Although most English Bibles refer to the *Old and New Covenants* as the *Old and New Testaments*, this can distort what the Bible is really all about. A Testament is best understood in English in the same way that we think of a last Will and Testament. The Bible speaks of God having a Testament (Will) and the beneficiaries of that Testament being referred to as “heirs”. Our inheritance is our everlasting life with God in heaven.

The **Old Covenant** was the establishment of the **Testament** while the **New Covenant** was the basis of it. In other words, the **Old Covenant** - with all its laws - served an educating purpose^{Gal.3:24} and the **New Covenant** fulfils (and reveals) it. *Now when someone leaves a will, it is necessary to prove that the person who made it is dead. The will goes into effect only after the person's death. While the person who made it is still alive, the will cannot be put into effect... But now, once for all time, [Jesus] has appeared... to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice. And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.*^{Heb.9:16-28}

Circumcision and salvation.^{Acts 15:5} Circumcision goes back to Abraham. God said to him, *“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you... You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you... My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”*^{Gen.17:1-14} Circumcision marked out the people of God^{Ex.12:43-49} and on entry to the Promised Land the covenant was renewed and circumcision re-emphasised. *And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.*^{Josh.5:8-9} For Israel, circumcision was the mark of belonging to God and it was unthinkable that anyone could belong to God and not be circumcised – indeed non-Jews were referred to as the uncircumcised;^{2Sam.2:20} (which is why Stephen’s rebuke was so powerful: *You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.*^{Acts.7:51})

The early Church was Jewish and they initially kept to the **Old Covenant** traditions because they did not understand that the **Old Covenant** was the “shadow” of the **New Covenant** and had become obsolete. Neither did the early Church really understand how to interpret the **Old Covenant** books of the Bible in the light of the **New Covenant**. But God had already explained the real meaning of circumcision: *The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.*^{Deut.30:6} *Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or my wrath will flare up and burn like fire because of the evil you have done.*^{Jer.4:4} The Church began to understand the implications of the **New Covenant** at Council at Jerusalem and decreed that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised.^{Acts.15:5-11} Unlike the other apostles, Paul had not met Jesus under the **Old Covenant** regime and so it was much easier for him to make the transition from **Old Covenant** to **New Covenant**. He taught that it is the internal attitude rather than the external sign that matters: *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.*^{Romans 2:28-29} **What marks out the people of God is faith and obedience:** *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*^{Gal.5:6} *For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.*^{1Cor.7:19} Being right with God is not a matter of what we do but rather than what God has done. True faith and obedience to God is a matter of the heart. If in our heart we do not put our trust in Christ and rely on the presence of the Holy Spirit, our faith will remain uncertain and our commitment unsure. Although we are **New Covenant** Believers, we share in the same inheritance as the **Old Covenant** Believers: *All of those people were praised because they had faith. But none of*

them received what God had promised. God had planned something better for us. So they would only be made perfect together with us.^{Heb.11:39-40}

Let's continue to celebrate our eternal life that we have inherited through Jesus' death and live in the liberty of the **New Covenant.**

November:

We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 2Thes.1:11

Sunday 2nd November 2014. Is.9:1-7

Nevertheless there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress!^{Is.9:1}

How many times this week have you said “it feels gloomy” now the clocks have returned to GMT? But think about those living within the Arctic Circle who have the “Polar Night” of up to 179 days with no sunshine at all – just twilight! Although this lack of natural daylight can trigger depression in some people, there is a much more serious problem of spiritual depression when there is no spiritual light. Depression, despair and anguish are serious problems but actually they are just symptoms and not the real problem. The real problem is “**sin**” which is essentially a contradiction of God’s Word: *Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark. They will go from one place to another, weary and hungry. And because they are hungry, they will rage and curse their king and their God. They will look up to heaven and down at the earth, but wherever they look, there will be trouble and anguish and dark despair. They will be thrown out into the darkness.*^{Is.8:20-22}

When God created the world, He set everything up for Adam to care and enjoy Creation – but on God’s terms! As soon as Adam disobeyed God’s instructions the problems began and sickness, stress and sweat were the order of the day for him and everyone else since! But God had a plan to restore mankind to His order of health, blessing and rest. *Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*^{Jn.8:12}

Salvation belongs to God and His Son Jesus Christ: *Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.*^{Rev.7:10} Indeed **Jesus** means **Saviour**: *you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*^{Matt.1:21} *Look, your Saviour (literally Jesus) is coming. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.*^{Is.63:11} But after we have **received Jesus (Saviour)**^{Jn.1:12} **and accepted His Salvation** (the forgiveness of our sins), we have to **follow Him – i.e. confess (acknowledge) Jesus as Lord.**^{Rom.10:9-10} “**Following Jesus**” is means being **Jesus’ Disciple which involves doing what He tells us to do,**^{Jn.2:5} **doing what He would do,**^{Lk.10:37} **saying what He says**^{Is.50:4} **and having the same attitude as Him.**^{Phil.2:5}

We can do this because: *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.*^{2Cor.4:6} *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.*^{Is.60:1-2} It is hard to imagine that God’s glory really is “*appearing over us*” but if we are Christians then Jesus has made His home in us and so of course God’s glory is all over us – and it is getting brighter: *The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.*^{Prov.4:18} **God’s light (or “glory”) gets brighter as we pay attention to His Word** – that is why we must be “**Bible literate**” and know what God has said to us: *We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*^{2Pet.1:19}

As we **make the right choices in our daily lives** (*rule righteously*), we get some beautiful “*sunrises*” in our heart: *The Spirit of the LORD speaks through me; his words are upon my tongue. The God of Israel spoke. The Rock of Israel said to me: “The one who rules righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is like the light of morning at sunrise, like a morning without clouds, like the gleaming of the sun on new grass after rain.*^{12Sam.23:2-4}

Although Jesus is the light of the world,^{Jn.8:12} **we are also the light of the world** and we must let our light (i.e. God's glory or His presence) shine: *You are the light of the world. A city on a hill can't be hidden. Also, people do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand. Then it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine in front of others. Then they will see the good things you do. And they will praise your Father who is in heaven.*^{Matt.5:14-16} **As we let our light shine, others are warmed and warned - attracted by our faith (especially peace with God) and advised of the danger of sin:** *Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever.*^{Dan.12:3} **Actually our light is a reflection of God's light** in the same way that a star or planet reflects the sun's light: *Do everything without finding fault or arguing. Then you will be pure and without blame. You will be children of God without fault in a sinful and evil world. Among the people of the world you shine like stars in the heavens. You shine as you hold out to them the word of life.*^{Phil.2:14-16} **Darkness is automatically dispelled by light and darkness will never extinguish light:** *The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*^{Jn.1:4-9}

On a foggy night during WWII, the captain of a battleship noticed a light rapidly approaching his ship. He ordered his signalman to flash a signal to the unidentified vessel, "Change your course 10 degrees starboard." Back came a signal, "Change your course 10 degrees port." The captain snapped off another message, "Change your course 10 degrees starboard—I am the Captain." Back came an answer, "Change your course 10 degrees port—I am Seaman 1st Class Johnson." By this time the light was growing ominously larger, so the captain grabbed the signal light and fired off the warning, "Change your course, I am a battleship!" Immediately a message came back, "Change your course, I am a lighthouse!"

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."^{John 8:12} Jesus is the Light, and when He saw that we were in danger of crashing upon the rocks of sin, He shone His Word and the light of the Holy Spirit upon us to guide us safely away. But sometimes when we ourselves don't see the danger, or think we can handle it, we ignore the light, ignore His warning, and keep ploughing ahead—straight into the rocks! **On this sea of life, don't ignore the light from the Lighthouse**—even if you think you're a battleship! But don't extinguish your own light either because you are the only light that most people ever see. *You, LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.*^{Psa.18:28} **Our life with God is too precious to keep to ourselves – so make sure we show it and share it:** *How precious, O Lord, is Your unfailing love; we find refuge in the shadow of Your wings. We feast, Lord Jesus, on the abundance of Your house and drink from Your river of delights. With You is the fountain of life, in Your light we see light.*^{Psalms 36:7-9}

Sunday 9th November 2014. Ps.5 Acts 16 Remembrance Sunday

We should be the Happiest People on Earth! *He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God.*^{Acts.16:34}

The Christian faith in God is not just believing the fact that God exists: *You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.*^{Jas.2:19} **No! The Christian faith is a personal trust in God who revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ who became human and then died to conquer sin as well as the devil and death.** Christian faith not only acknowledges what God has done but personalises it by accepting it for oneself based on the fact of

Jesus' resurrection and a conviction that God always keeps His Word. *And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.*^{Rom.10:8-10} *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*^{Heb.11:6} The word **Faith** in our Bible does not mean something that is vague or nebulous like "blind-faith" or "leap of faith"! **Faith** means **trust, being convinced, assured, confident and persuaded**. God has given us more than enough information to be convinced that He is trustworthy and therefore we can trust Him. *When God wanted to guarantee his promises, he gave his word, a rock-solid guarantee—God can't break his word. And because his word cannot change, the promise is likewise unchangeable. We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It's an unbreakable spiritual lifeline (an anchor that keeps the soul), reaching past all appearances right to the very presence of God where Jesus, running on ahead of us, has taken up his permanent post as high priest for us, in the order of Melchizedek.*^{Heb.6:17-20}

No wonder the Christian faith fills us with joy! God is for us - He provides and protects us; our sins are "remised" (taken away)^{Lk.24:47} **and we have peace with God!**

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see. By an act of faith, Abel brought a better sacrifice to God than Cain. It was what he believed, not what he brought, that made the difference. That's what God noticed and approved as righteous. After all these centuries, that belief continues to catch our notice.^{Heb.11:1-4}

Our joy starts in our spirit (which is why it is not dependent upon natural circumstances): *My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*^{Lk.1:46-47} We must ensure that our spiritual life is healthy because then our natural life will also be healthy: *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.*^{3Jn.1:2} *Spiritual health is true wealth and prosperity: But godliness with contentment is great gain. (A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God.)*^{1Tim.6:6} *I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"*^{Lk.16:9-11}

The NIV Bible mentions **Joy** 214 times (152 OT; 62 NT) and **Rejoice** 121 times (97 in OT; 24 NT). Jesus was elevated above everyone else by His joy: *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.*^{Heb.1:9} So it is little wonder that joy is our hallmark: *They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.*^{Ecc.5:20} *I will anoint them with oil to give them gladness instead of sorrow. I will give them a spirit of praise in place of a spirit of sadness.*^{Is.61:3} *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.*^{Is.61:10}

This joy is inextricably linked to Grace, Gratitude and Generosity:

Grace: The Greek word for 'grace' is 'charis' and 'joy' is 'chara'. **Grace and joy go together!**

The dictionary says 'It seems that "charis" is not always clearly differentiated in meaning from "chara". "Charis" is what delights. It may be a state causing or accompanying joy; the element of delight in the beautiful, the favour shown by fortune, what is pleasing.' So there is a deep inner connection between 'grace' and 'joy.' Grace is what delights! Grace is what liberates from any prescription of what we 'should' do for God. Grace produces in us a new heart, a heart

which delights in doing God's will^{Jer.31:33-34; Ezk.36:26-27} – this is the 'new covenant' that God made through Jesus' blood. We don't have to do anything for God to earn His favour. He is gracious with us for the sake of Jesus. **That means that God delights in us!**

God is gracious: *The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love*^{Ps.145:8}
and He is also graceful (full of grace): *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*^{Jn.1:14} *Through faith in Jesus we have received God's grace. In that grace we stand. We are full of joy because we expect to share in God's glory.*^{Rom.5:2}

Gratitude: There is also a deep inner connection between 'grace' (*charis*) and 'thanksgiving' (*eu-charis-teo*). To be full of gratitude is to live out of grace - the two words are the same! God's grace causes our thanksgiving! The words come from the same root. God gives us grace – and when that overflows from our lives, it comes out as thanksgiving and gratitude. So: *Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.*^{Phil.4:4-5} Gratitude is linked to our personal faith: *One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*^{Lk.17:15-19} Thanksgiving is probably the only thing we can give to God that He hasn't first given to us.

Generosity: 'Grace' (*charis*) is also the word for 'generosity'! God is full of grace in the sense of being full of generous giving and wanting others to have the good things that He has for them. It's God's nature to give Himself away! So to be generous with others is to enter into grace! To share in God's generosity and show grace to others, is to share in God's delight and joy. No wonder true generosity is such a liberating, joyful thing! As we grow in the knowledge of God's grace and undeserved favour to us, we delight more and more in what God Himself delights in. *The [righteous] are always generous and lend freely;*^{Ps.37:26} *Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.*^{2Cor.8:2-5} *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*^{2Cor.9:6-11}

Let's ensure that we live up to our reputation of being happy people who are marked out by true joy that is seen in our grace, gratitude and generosity.

A Captain's Innings - A Poem for Remembrance Day

*The nets are down, the scoreboard blank, Persistent is the rain;
November's fallen leaves Stir memories again*

*Of keen-fought contests that were played Upon this well-kept green;
But Cecil, Fred and Tom were picked To play a distant team.*

*In khaki clad, in fields of mud, They played their finest game
And "slogged it out" till "close of play" - Immortal is their name!*

*But when I think of men who died In frenzied, costly strife,
It never fails to bring to mind The Christ who gave His life*

*Not for a nation's flag or cause - Mere transitory gains -
But in the rout of satan's hosts Who held us all in chains.*

*Mons, Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge, Blood-drench'd Gallipoli;
But never was a triumph won Greater than Calvary!*

*So, Captain of our Salvation, As we in tribute pause,
Inspire in us such bravery, Yet for Your highest cause.*

David Allen (2014)

Sunday 16th November 2014. Ps.8 Acts 16

What to do when you are treated unfairly: *But Paul replied, "They have publicly beaten us without a trial and put us in prison—and we are Roman citizens."*^{Acts 16:37}

Life is not fair: *I have observed something else under the sun. The fastest runner doesn't always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skilful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don't always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time.*^{Ecc.9:11} Paul the Apostle was converted about 2 years after Jesus was crucified and was martyred 30 years later in AD67. When he wrote to the Church at Corinth in about AD57 he said: *I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have travelled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers... I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.*^{2Cor.11:23-37} Paul probably suffered a greater number of injustices than anyone else in the NT and so his instructions (especially about unfairness) come from personal experience as well as being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Paul did not blame God because God is good and there is no unrighteousness with Him at all. *You are good, and what you do is good;*^{Ps.119:68} *Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*^{Gen.18:25} Actually, to blame God is sin: *In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*^{Job.1:22} Here are 3 principles that help us handle unfairness: **Submit to God; Sing praises to God; See God's salvation plan.**

1 Submit to God: When Paul and Silas found themselves beaten and imprisoned unjustly they did not retaliate but entrusted themselves to God. This is in line with Jesus' example: *For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right.*^{1Pet.2:21-24} **We were saved by submitting to God** (which is what confessing Jesus as Lord really means): *That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*^{Rom.10:9} When we submit to God (acknowledge and trust Him), He directs our paths: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.*^{Prov.3:5-6} Sadly most Christians don't really believe that God will protect and provide for them or they would not be anxious about their situation! Jesus said that we really can trust our Heavenly Father to care for our needs: *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life*

more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?^{2Matt.8:25-26} If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers—most of which are never even seen—don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.^{1Matt.8:30-34}

The sign of a mature Christian is inner peace and joy regardless of circumstances: But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life.^{1Tim.6:6-12}

2 Sing praises to God: Although Paul and Silas did not retaliate to their injustice, they did not suffer in silence either – they *prayed and sang a hymn of praise to God.*^{Acts16:25} They did not suffer from the “poms” (poor old me syndrome) or even complain **but prayed and sang praises to God.** Prayer is really submission to God whereas Praise is a declaration of our submission to Him. Singing praise to God is not vague or casual but the result of a personal persuasion and conviction that will over-ride any natural feelings of timidity or fearfulness - one version says that they *sang a robust hymn to God.*

Praise is important because God has ordained praise^{Ps.8:1-2} and formed us to praise Him.^{Is.43:21} Praise is good^{Ps.92:1} and honours God.^{Ps.50:23} Praise is fitting (*becoming or appropriate*)^{Ps.33:1; Ps.147:1} and like a garment we put on.^{Is.61:3} Praise prepares the way for God to show His salvation^{Ps.50:23} and is to always be on our lips.^{Heb.13:15; Ps.34:1} In the OT, Israel was victorious when they praised God: *Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendour of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: “Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.” As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*^{2Chron.20:21-22} Praise is the result of faith (complete confidence and trust in God and His Word) and it is faith that causes us to prevail or overcome: *for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*^{1Jn.5:4-5}

The main ingredients of Overcoming (faith) is the Cross, our Confession and our Commitment: *For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They **overcame** him by the **blood of the Lamb** and by the **word of their testimony**; they **did not love their lives** so much as to shrink from death.*^{Rev.12:10-11}

3 See God's salvation plan: When the Jailer was about to commit suicide Paul didn't say that it was “natural justice”! No! Paul saw God's salvation plan and was able to share the Jesus with him resulting in his whole household coming to faith: *And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household... and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.*^{Acts.16:32-34} **We need to cultivate a “salvation” attitude and see God's salvation plan at every opportunity rather than craving our own comfort and convenience.** *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*^{2Tim.1:6} This word translated “self-discipline” is literally “saved mind.”

Joseph saw the unfairness against him as God's plan of salvation (his brothers tried to kill him and then sold him as a slave): *But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people.*^{Gen.50:20}

Mordecai saw the unfairness against Esther as God's plan of salvation (she was taken from a believing family into a pagan king's harem): *For if you remain silent at this time,*

relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"^{Est.4:14}

Even getting older can feel unfair: *And so we come to the end of this musing over life. My advice to you is to remember your Creator, God, while you are young: before life gets hard and the injustice of old age comes upon you - before the years arrive when pleasure feels far out of reach.*^{Ecc.12:1}

How do you see unfairness against you? *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*^{Rom.8:28}

As we apply these 3 keys: Submit to God, Sing praises to God, See God's salvation plan, we will not only survive but see souls saved and stay serene! Remember we are too blessed to be stressed.

Sunday 23rd November 2014. Ps.9:1-10 Acts 17.

Our failure is God's success!

God's Kingdom is not of this world and neither are God's values the same as this world's values. Jesus said: *"My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom... my Kingdom is not of this world."*^{Jn.18:36} So what this world calls important is not what God calls important and God can use the foolish things (including our "failures") to fulfil His purposes. *God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.*^{1Cor.1:27-29}

Paul's visit to Thessalonica looked like a complete failure as it involved turmoil and trouble followed by a quick exit. At Berea it was a very different matter as they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.^{Acts.17:11}

Hearing God's Word with eagerness and examining it for accuracy is a good practice: *Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark.*^{Is.8:20}

And we too encourage hearing God's Word with eagerness and examining it for accuracy because God's instructions are not just good morals - they are our life: *Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land.*^{Deut.32:46-47}

My son, pay attention to what I say. Listen closely to my words. Don't let them out of your sight. Keep them in your heart. They are life to those who find them. They are health to your whole body. Above everything else, guard your heart. It is where your life comes from.^{Prov.4:20-23}

(However we are under the New Covenant and so we are living in the fulfilment of much of the Old Covenant. [Jesus] did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, [Jesus] came to accomplish their purpose.^{Matt.5:17}
[Diet, worship services, or holy days] are a shadow of the things that were to come.^{Col.2:17})

Paul's visit to Thessalonica was quite short and it appears that they were prevented by the authorities from returning because Jason had to "post bond" for him: *Not finding Paul and Silas, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. "Paul and Silas have caused trouble all over the world," they shouted, "and now they are here disturbing our city, too... So the officials forced Jason and the other believers to post bond, and then they released them.*^{Acts.17:5-9} *Brothers and sisters, we were torn away from you for a short time. We were no longer with you in person, but we kept you in our thoughts. We really longed to see you. So we tried very hard to do so. We wanted to come to you. Again and again I, Paul, wanted to come. But Satan stopped us.*^{1Thes.2:17-18}

But just a couple of years after Paul's visit to Thessalonica, he wrote to them from Corinth and commended them for their faith: *And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but*

as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.^{1Thes.2:13} You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure.^{1Thes.2:1} You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers... your faith in God has become known everywhere... They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.^{1Thes.1:6-10}

The Gospel is never a failure regardless of how many (or how few) receive it: *Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*^{Jas.5:20} The value of a human soul is beyond price: *No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.*^{Ps.49:7-8} Or *what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?*^{Mk.8:37}

God's Success is His plan of salvation which comes through people hearing the Gospel (good news about Jesus Christ) and this gospel is *the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.*^{Rom.1:16} Everything else is secondary to God's plan of Salvation – even our health, wealth and comfort.

When God works, He starts with our spirit, which is unseen and eternal. *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*^{1Cor.4:18} So we should be careful how we judge what we can't see – look at the fruit as well as the leaves! *Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.*^{Matt.7:20} *The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*^{1Sam.16:7}

God works by the Holy Spirit who is unseen but He is not unnoticed. We can see the results of His work even though we can't see the Holy Spirit. *The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*^{Jn.3:8} The Holy Spirit comes with power and conviction: *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*^{1Thes.1:4-6}

God's invisible work soon becomes visible and clear for all to see. The Church at Thessalonica became a Model that Paul boasted about because their conversion and subsequent change became a talking point for others. *And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.*^{1Thes.1:7-9}

We are being conformed to Christ's image and the change in our life is real even if we can't see any daily difference. As a child's physical growth is seen over months not days so our spiritual growth is rarely seen over days but there is clear growth for each of us over the year. *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*^{Rom.8:29} *We all display the Lord's glory. We are being changed to become more like him so that we have more and more glory. And the glory comes from the Lord, who is the Holy Spirit.*^{2Cor.3:18} The change involves turning from idols but also an eager expectation of Jesus' return in power and glory. We believe in the "**Foursquare Gospel**" of **Jesus as our Saviour, Healer, Baptist and Coming King!** *They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*^{1Thes.1:9-10} The sky not grave is our goal: *"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*^{Acts 1:11}

So let's forget our "failures" and see God's success of changed lives – especially our own- from sinner to saint and darkness to light: *So let us throw off everything that stands in our way. Let us throw off any sin that holds on to us so tightly. Let us keep on running the race marked out for us. Let us keep looking to Jesus. He is the author of faith. He also makes it perfect. He paid no attention to the shame of the cross. He suffered there because of the joy he was looking forward to. Then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. He put up with attacks from sinners. So think about him. Then you won't get tired. You won't lose hope.*^{Heb.12:1-3} **And let's continue to be the model that God expects us to be:** *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*^{1Tim.4:12}

Sunday 30th November 2014 Ps.9:11-20 Acts 18.

How well do you know the Scriptures?

Today we have the advantage of the NT Scriptures as well, to help us see the complete picture of God's Kingdom - how Jesus saves from the penalty of sin and sends the power of the Holy Spirit. Apollos knew the Scriptures and taught about Jesus accurately,^{Acts.18:25} but (like some today) he only knew part of the story! Although Apollos knew about forgiveness of sins, he had not experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit (he had taught the Ephesians who did not know about the Holy Spirit.^{Acts18:24;19:1-2}) He knew the Baptism of John – the remission of sins but not the Baptism of Jesus – the release of the power to live for God. Apollos knew that Jesus had been *delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification*^{Rom.4:25} but did not know that Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit.^{Jn.7:39} The Bible is the story of God's plan of Redemption as revealed in Jesus Christ and God has recorded in the Bible everything we need to know about Him. Although the Bible is divided into two parts – Old Testament and New Testament - it is now a single unit making a complete library. (Our English word *Bible* is from the Greek word for library.) The Good News that we proclaim is that **Jesus is the Messiah and God's Kingdom has already begun - so the benefits and blessings of God's Kingdom have also begun** - they are for us here and now and not only when we die.

The Jews longed for the Messiah (Deliverer) who would usher in the Kingdom of God. *The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.*^{Rom.11:26-27} But when Jesus introduced the Kingdom of God it was not the kingdom the Jews were looking for. **God's Kingdom is the rule of Jesus Christ in our hearts now – an internal Kingdom**, not an external kingdom. **God's Kingdom is an active submission to Jesus' will and desire where the Holy Spirit dominates us**, not an active (or passive) submission to self-will where our own heart and mind dominates us. **God's Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom**, not a political or geographical Kingdom: *Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you".*^{Lk.17:20-21}

Jesus taught that His Kingdom required a new attitude because it is very different from the kingdoms of the world (which all oppose God): *"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my*

followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.^{1Matt.5:3-12}

John the Baptist's ministry and work was to prepare people for the Messiah and God's Kingdom. [John preached] a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation."^{1Lk.3:3-6} The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him. John said, "Look! The Lamb of God! He takes away the sin of the world! This is the One I was talking about."^{1Jn.1:29-30} John exhorted people to repent (change their minds) and live a godly life: Produce fruit in keeping with repentance... The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same... Don't collect any more than you are required to... Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay... And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.^{1Lk.3:8-18}

This Kingdom of God would be under 'new management' and so a change in the Jewish religion was necessary. The Jewish religious tradition (even though it had stood the test of time for 1000's of years) would now become obsolete because a better and final "religion" of the New Covenant was being introduced. This New Covenant would actually work and never need replacing at a later date. As with any code of morals or set of values, the Old Covenant's weakness was not in its standards but in its implementation. Ever since Adam sinned, mankind's nature has been opposed to God thus making it impossible for anyone to totally obey God: The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad.^{1Jer.17:9} There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.^{1Rom.3:10-11}

There are many differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant but perhaps the greatest difference is the forgiveness of sins leading to a good conscience before God. [The Old Covenant was] not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper... How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!^{1Heb.9:9-14} Although Christians are still capable of doing wrong (both unintentionally and intentionally!) under the New Covenant our sins do not separate us from God. We are inseparably joined to Him by the Holy Spirit and His abiding presence empowers us to continue to live for Him: But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in the Spirit.^{1Cor.6:17} For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.^{1Pet.1:23}

Although Jesus introduced God's Kingdom, it did not start properly until Jesus returned to His Father and sent the Holy Spirit as His replacement: God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.^{1Acts2:32-33} "When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me."^{1Jn.15:26} And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.^{1Jn.14:16-17} But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.^{1Acts2:8} Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.^{1Acts2:38-39}

It was this next part of God's plan – **the outpouring, indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit** - that Apollos had not heard about and which Priscilla and Aquila explained to him: [Apollos] was accurate in everything he taught about Jesus up to a point, but he

only went as far as the baptism of John. He preached with power in the meeting place. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and told him the rest of the story.^{Acts 18:25-26}

There is more to Christianity than having our sins forgiven – we are now God’s Family and we have power to live for God and power to witness too! Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”^{Gal. 4:6} Justification is more than “just as if I’d never sinned”. Justification means that all of Jesus’ righteousness has been given to me as well! However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.^{Rom. 4:5}

God has high expectations for us and we have a Family reputation to uphold - **God’s good Name is in our care!** Don’t settle for half the story but read the end of the book! “These are dependable and accurate words, every one... Let evildoers do their worst and the dirty-minded go all out in pollution, but let the righteous maintain a straight course and the holy continue on in holiness.” “Yes, I’m on my way! I’ll be there soon! I’m bringing my payroll with me. I’ll pay all people in full for their life’s work. I’m A to Z, the First and the Final, Beginning and Conclusion. “How blessed are those who wash their robes! The Tree of Life is theirs for good, and they’ll walk through the gates to the City. But outside for good are the filthy curs: sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters—all who love and live lies. “I, Jesus, sent my Angel to testify to these things for the churches. I’m the Root and Branch of David, the Bright Morning Star.” “Come!” say the Spirit and the Bride. Whoever hears, echo, “Come!” Is anyone thirsty? Come! All who will, come and drink, Drink freely of the Water of Life! ... “I’m on my way! I’ll be there soon!” Yes! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you. Oh, Yes!^{Rev. 21}

December:

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 2Thes.3:16

Sunday 7th December 2014. Ps.12. Family Service

Communicating with God

Imagine what it is like for Christians who live in countries where they have to hide their Bibles and praise, pray and preach in secret. Following the *International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP)* our children have been learning what it is like to live in countries where Christians are persecuted. Their mission has been to *send secret Bibles to secret believers* by baking and selling cakes. Their “*Buy Buns for Bibles*” raised £60.00 to send New Testaments to Christians around the world who would love to own a Bible.

Well done children!!! So today they are showing us their work, (using resources from *Open Doors*, see www.opendoorsuk.org) including their own “*Secret Kidzone Identity Cards*” and also their “*secret house-church*” that they have made to help them pray for “*secret Christians*”.

Communicating with God is not like a game of “Dodge Ball” where we try to “*hit*” God with our prayers and sometimes manage to score! Communicating with God for Christians (like the Gospel) is Simple, Settled and Spiritual and we know God hears us: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*^{1Jn.5:14-15}

Anyone can talk to God but not everyone can pray (in the sense of knowing that God hears and answers them). **It takes a Believer to really pray.** *Abimelech said, “Lord, will you... Then God said to Abimelech [Abraham] is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live.*^{Gen.20:4-7} To pray effective prayers we must have a relationship with God and speak the truth about Him! *My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has.*^{Job.42:8} **There is only one way to have a relationship with God – through Jesus Christ:** *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father also.*^{Jn.14:6-7} **This relationship with God through Jesus makes us righteous:** *For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! ...just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*^{Rom.5:17-21}

Believers are “**righteous**” (made right with God and thus have no barrier between them and God) because they **believe God, believe what He has done and believe what He has said.** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*^{Rom.1:16-17} Being righteous doesn’t make us weird or “other-worldly” but it does give us a right-standing before God that makes our prayers powerfully effective: *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*^{Jas.5:16-18} *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.*^{1Pet.3:12}

Although Believers’ prayers are not “*hit-and-miss*” like a game of “*dodge-ball*” the Bible explains that **there are some reasons why God does not “hear” our prayers:** *I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had enjoyed having sin in my heart, the*

Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.^{Ps.66:17-19} So I told you, but you would not listen. You rebelled against the Lord's command ... You came back and wept before the Lord, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you.^{Deut.1:43-45} You husbands must give honour to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered.^{1Pet.3:7}

When we pray, we are to pray to God the Father, in the Name of Jesus, with the help of the Holy Spirit. God is our focus, not our problems or our needs. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. "When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy."^{Matt.6:6-9}

When we pray we are to pray with an attitude of gratitude: Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.^{1Thes.5:16-18}

When we pray it is helpful to use Scripture verses (or Bible based hymns and songs): all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them – you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying... But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."^{Acts.4:24-30}

When we pray and are lost for words, we should let the Holy Spirit help us: God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.^{Rom.8:26-28}

Sometimes we should pray so that others can hear us (in order to help them believe): Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."^{Jn.11:41-42}

When we pray, let us pray good prayers – prayers that God can answer (not prayers that God can't answer or has already answered). The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply.^{Matt.6:6-9}

Sunday 14th December 2014. Ps.42. Lk.1:26-56

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.^{Lk.1:46}

What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.^{2Cor.4:18} We are much more than our physical body that we can see because we have life and what makes us alive is our soul which cannot be measured in terms of chemicals or even shape. All living creatures (including humans) have the "breath of life" and when this departs they die. And to all the animals of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food." It was so.^{Gen.1:30} Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died.^{Gen.7:22} We call this "breath of life" the "soul" which is our personality - our mind, emotions and desires. **The Bible says that we**

praise God with our soul: *My soul magnifies the Lord.*^{Lk.1:46} *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God.*^{Is.61:10} *Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul and forget not all his benefits.*^{Ps.103:1-2} Because our soul includes our mind, **we have a choice what we do with our soul** - we can be glad or sad; encouraged or discouraged; cheerful or cheerless. Being sad is not necessarily bad but if sadness controls us then we become melancholy and downcast or depressed (which is another way of describing self-pity). Despair and anxiety is not God's will for us and the antidote is to trust God and praise Him. *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*^{Ps.42:5} *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*^{1Pet.5:7} *So then, banish anxiety from your heart.*^{Ecc.11:10} *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*^{1Thes.5:16-18}

Eleanor H. Porter's best-selling 1913 novel "Pollyanna" is about a young girl who plays the "Glad Game," which consists of finding something to be glad about in every situation. It started one Christmas when Pollyanna, who was hoping for a doll in the missionary barrel, found only a pair of crutches inside. Making the game up on the spot, Pollyanna's father taught her to look at the good side of things—in this case, to be glad about the crutches because "we didn't need to use them!" This "attitude of gratitude" is a godly principle as well as being a good principle and should be the standard for all Christians: *Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*^{Eph.5:18-20}

Appreciation is a choice that we make and an activity of a mature (saved) soul – it is what our faith aims for: *for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*^{1Pet.1:9} And our soul affects every part of our life: *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.*^{3Jn.1:2} A mature (sanctified) soul is not instantaneous but the result of trusting God and appreciating what He has done for us. Even Paul confessed that he had not yet achieved this state of perfection (sanctification): *I consider everything to be nothing compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. To know him is the best thing of all. Because of him I have lost everything. But I consider all of it as worthless so I can get to know Christ... I have not yet received all of those things. I have not yet been made perfect. But I move on to take hold of what Christ Jesus took hold of me for. Brothers and sisters, I don't consider that I have taken hold of it yet. But here is the one thing I do. I forget what is behind me. I push hard toward what is ahead of me. I move on toward the goal to win the prize. God has appointed me to win it. The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus himself.*^{Phil.3:8-14}

If we were just body and soul we would be like the animals and even Solomon wondered about this for a while: *For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?*^{Ecc.3:19-21} Careful training such as self-help and positive-thinking programmes have some value but they don't deal with the root of all problems which is our separation from God. *Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.*^{1Tim.4:6} *You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So keep on living in him. Have your roots in him. Build yourselves up in him. Grow strong in what you believe, just as you were taught. Be more thankful than ever before. Make sure no one captures you... by using false reasoning that has no meaning. Their ideas depend on human teachings. They also depend on the basic things the people of this world believe. They don't depend on Christ. God's whole nature is living in Christ in human form. Because you belong to Christ, you have everything you need. He is the ruler over every power and authority.*^{Col.2:6-10}

What makes humans different from the rest of Creation is that God breathed His own breath (or life) into Adam: *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.*^{Gen.2:7} *But it is the spirit in a person, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding.*^{Job.32:8} *The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*^{Job.33:4} **When God breathed His life (or Spirit) into Adam, he received an eternal spirit from God that is God-conscious.** *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart.*^{Ecc.3:11} When Adam sinned, it was this God-conscious part of him (*his spirit*) that died (*became separated from God*) and all Adam's descendants have inherited a "dead" spirit and so it is our spirit that must be "re-born" if we are to be re-united with God: *Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God... I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'*^{Jn.3:3-7} Our re-birth was the reason for Jesus' Incarnation – of God becoming human: *The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.*^{1Cor.15:45} *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*^{Ez.36:26-27}

Although our personality and our faith are inseparable (our soul and spirit are intertwined), God distinguishes between them: *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.*^{Heb.4:12-13} *The LORD's light penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive.*^{Prov.20:7} **Now we are re-born, we must look after our spirit:** *Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*^{2Cor.7:1} **We look after our spirit by using the Word of God:** *And take the sword of the Holy Spirit. The sword is God's word,*^{Eph.6:17} **by praying & praising:** *So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.*^{1Cor.14:15} **by serving God:** *God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.*^{Rom.1:8-10}

Solomon eventually came to his senses and knew that our spirits returned to God: *Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken. Don't wait until the water jar is smashed at the spring and the pulley is broken at the well. For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it... Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.*^{Ecc.12:6-14}

We must make every effort to ensure that our re-born spirit dominates our soul and not let our soul dominate our spirit. *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.*^{Ps.43:5} **We do this by making God and His Word our delight and praising Him:** *Then I will go to the altar of God. I will go to God. He is my joy and my delight. God, you are my God. I will praise you by playing the harp.*^{Ps.43:4} **So like Mary, let's continue to magnify the Lord with our soul and rejoice in God our Saviour with our spirit.**

Sunday 21st December 2014 Ps.14 Matt.1:18-25

The true meaning of Christmas - what's in a name?

You are to give him the name **Jesus**, because he will **save his people from their sins...** They will call him **Emmanuel** - which means, "**God with us.**"^{»Matt.1:21-23}

Names are important, not because of the actual word but because of what they mean or represent. Words are tokens for a particular meaning which can change as time goes on. For instance: **Broadcast** meant sowing seeds with a sweeping movement of the hand or a “*broad cast*”. Its media use began with radio in 1922. **Grin** meant to *scowl* or show the teeth as a sign of anger. **Naughty** meant you had *naught* or nothing. **Hussy** comes from the word *housewife*. **Decimate**: originally this meant “*to kill one in 10*” not totally destroy. Someone in the **infantry** was *too young* to be allowed to serve in the cavalry. [Even our alphabet has changed with some letters now omitted such as þ (thorn) i.e. þe (the); the þ was replaced with a “y” i.e. *Ye Olde Sweete Shoppe!* Also p (wynn) now our “w”; ð (eth) – a hard “th” used in words like thought.] But whatever changes happen to the meaning of our English words, the meanings of God’s Names never change - **God is Eternal**: *I am the LORD. I do not change.*^{Mal.3:6} Jesus is also God and so **He is also Eternal**: *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.*^{Jn.1:1-2}

Jesus came to earth as a Child but unlike the mythical “gods” of the pagans who were supposed to be half “god” and half human, Jesus kept all His deity and became truly human. Jesus was as much God as if He were not man and as much man as if He were not God! *Christ Jesus had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status... When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!*^{Phil.2:5-7} *So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*^{Jn.1:14} Jesus’ “*Incarnation*” (literally “*became flesh*”) was prophesied by Isaiah hundreds of years earlier: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*^{Is.9:6-7}

Child: Jesus was to be born of a virgin.^{Is.7:14} **Christianity is miraculous from beginning to end** – from Creation to the final Resurrection including Jesus’ incarnation, sinless life, vicarious death, physical resurrection and ascension. Jesus didn’t “float down” out of heaven but began His human life as a fertilised embryo within Mary. Only a Perfect human that could die and not be destroyed by death and so Jesus came as the “*Last Adam*”^{1Cor.15:45} (there will never be another Adam who will undo Jesus’ life-giving work) and as the “*Second Man*”^{1Cor.15:47} (to introduce a new genus of human beings – those who are re-born from above).

Son: Jesus was born as a Son who would inherit all the promises made to King David’s son: *I will be his father. And he will be my son. I took my love away from the man who ruled before you. But I will never take my love away from your son. I will place him over my house and my kingdom forever. His throne will last forever.*^{1Chron.17:13-14; Heb.1:5} King Herod wasn’t even a Jew and so had no theological right to the Jewish throne – no wonder he was *disturbed*^{Matt.2:3} when he heard about the One born King of the Jews!

Wonderful Counsellor: Jesus has become our wisdom: *Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*^{1Cor.1:30} He is the very source of all wisdom and life: *For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.*^{Ps.36:9} Jesus is also wonderful: *All this also comes from the LORD Almighty, whose plan is wonderful, whose wisdom is magnificent.*^{Is.28:29} *Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!*^{Rom.11:33}

Mighty God: Jesus Christ is Son of God by nature and not by adoption. In the C4th Arius taught that the Son of God “*came to be from things that were not*” and that he was “*from*

another substance" than that of the Father. A Council met at Nicaea (in modern day Turkey) in AD325 and agreed on a statement (now known as the *Nicene Creed*) which declares: *We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Yes Jesus was God, is God and will always be God. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."*^{Rev.1:8}

Everlasting Father: Jesus is not God the Father – He is a distinct and separate Person but He is “father-like” in the sense of protecting and providing. Remember - “God” is a title not a name (in much the way as “Queen” is the title of our Monarch and not her name). The name could also be interpreted as “father of eternity” i.e. Jesus is eternal.

Prince of Peace: Melchizedek in the OT prefigured Jesus – *Melchizedek was the king of Salem and a priest for God Most High... Melchizedek's name means "king of goodness," and he is king of Salem, which means "king of peace." No one knows who Melchizedek's father or mother was, where he came from, when he was born, or when he died. Melchizedek is like the Son of God; he continues being a priest forever.*^{Heb.7:1-3} Jesus has made peace between God and man: *But now in Christ Jesus, you... are brought near through the blood of Christ's death. Christ himself is our peace... His purpose was to make... one new people in him and in this way make peace.*^{Eph.2:13-15} Actually peace comes from knowing God and Jesus and His word: *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*^{2Pet.1:2} *Great peace have those who love your law and nothing can make them stumble.*^{Psa.119:165} *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.*^{Is.26:3}

Jesus' kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that will never be overthrown: *the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.*^{Dan.2:44-45}

The true meaning of Christmas has to do with Jesus Christ. It isn't about love, it isn't about giving, it isn't about peace on earth - these may be related, but Christmas isn't about those things. **The real meaning of Christmas is the Cross.** Jesus was “born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.” Early Christians abbreviated the names of God usually by the first and last letter (and mostly placed a line above those letters); thus Christ (Χριστός) was χω. This is called *nomina sacra* (Latin for “sacred names”). Earliest versions of writing Christmas as “Xmas” in English go back to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (AD1100). The Oxford English Dictionary cites the use of “X” for “Christ” as early as 1485. Christmas was written as “X'temmas” in 1551. Lord Byron (1811), Samuel Coleridge (1801), Lewis Carroll (1864) all used the spelling “Xmas.” **Far from removing Christ, Xmas puts the cross back into Christmas** – maybe we should have a campaign to put the cross back into Christmas! But **Xmas, Christmas** and the **Cross** by themselves are not enough. We need to personally apply their meanings.

The “*spirit of Christmas*” is more about the feelings that we have, which result from our past experiences with Christmas – family, festivities, food and fun. Christmas trees and ornaments are just that – trees and ornaments! They are cultural expressions connected with the emotional impact of Christmas. So let's appreciate both the emotional “*spirit of Christmas*” and the spiritual meaning of Christmas of **Jesus “saving us from our sins”** and being **Emmanuel - “God with us”**.

May you have a very Happy and Blessed Christmas.

Merry Mas - it's just not the same without Christ!

Sunday 28th December 2014 Ps.15 Luke 2:21-40

How are you going to start 2015?

Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel.^{Lk.2:29-32}

Let's start this New Year with a real sense of God **sending** us to achieve His purpose for our lives. **Jesus was sent to us:** *The Father who sent me has himself given witness about me.*^{Jn.5:37} *I stand with the Father, who sent me... I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.*^{Jn.8:16-18} **Now Jesus has sent us:** *Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*^{Jn.20:21}

This being “sent” is not just being sent on a “mission” such as “evangelizing” but the principle that should direct our whole life. We are not here “by chance” nor is life a matter of “fate” but God has a purpose and a plan for us to fulfil.

God will do His part for us: *The LORD will fulfil [his purpose] for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever.*^{Ps.138:8} **But we must do our part too:** *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.*^{Phil.2:12-13} **Others have accomplished this so why not us?** *David...served the purpose of God in his own generation.*^{Acts.13:26}

An *enfilade* is a suite of rooms aligned with each other so the doors entering each room are aligned providing a vista through the entire suite of rooms. For instance in the Houses of Parliament (Palace of Westminster), the *enfilade* of State Rooms presents an uninterrupted view from the throne in the Lords' Chamber through three lobbies - Lords', Central, and Members' Lobby - to the Speaker's Chair in the Commons Chamber at the other end of the Palace. Too many people viewing their failures (and sometimes the successes) of the past and letting them control their present – they are still living in yesteryear! Sometime ago we had a “bad year” but we decided that we would treat it like a “sleeping-policeman” (a ramp in the road to slow traffic down) – that although it was “bumpy” we had driven over it and so it was now in the past – we must get over it and get on with the rest of our life! Let's shut the door of 2014 and move on to 2015 with a clear conscience and a sense of purpose. We have been redeemed from an empty way of life and are not meandering any longer: *knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*^{1Pet.1:18-19}

The difference between a Believer and non-Believer is that Believers know that they are redeemed by precious blood of Christ. Just as Simeon could be released in peace because he had seen “God's salvation” (i.e. Jesus the Saviour) so now **we can be released from our past and live in peace because we have seen Jesus the Saviour.**

Last week we saw that Jesus is the Child; Son; Wonderful Counsellor; Mighty God; Everlasting Father; Prince of Peace^{Is.9:6-7} and as the “Second Man”^{1Cor.15:47} Jesus began new genus of human beings who are re-born from above. Our spiritual genealogy is only one generation from God – **God has children but no grandchildren!** *But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.*^{Jn.1:12-13} Jesus could trace both His legal human ancestry^{Matt.1:1-17} and His physical human ancestry^{Lk.3:23-38} to David and so back to Adam. But our spiritual ancestry is either to the *first Adam* or to the *Last Adam*.^{1Cor.15:45} If we are re-born by God^{Jn.3:3} we are directly descended from the *Last Adam* and part of a new genus of people: *But God chose you to be his people. You are royal priests. You are a holy nation. You are a people who belong to God. All of this is so that you can sing his praises.*

He brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people. But now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy. But now you have received mercy.^{1Pet.2:9-10} Our natural ancestry (traced from the first Adam) is of no longer of any relevance because our relationship with God is spiritual: *The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*^{Jn.4:23-24} Our spiritual genealogy is not Priest – us, or Pastor – us or even Parent – us but **God – us**. If we don't realise this important truth we will always have an excuse for our attitude and behaviour – it was my upbringing; my parents; my schooling; my church; my Pastor! *So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*^{2Cor.5:16-17} Until Paul became a Christian he thought that his human ancestry gave him a spiritual advantage over others. (Others think that their human ancestry – or “natural baggage” – give them a disadvantage!) *For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*^{Phil.3:3-8}

Our identity is now in Jesus and God has made **His story** become **our story**: *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*^{1Cor.1:30} So, just as God has freed Jesus from the agony (pain) of the past (including death) so God has freed us from the pain of the past: *But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*^{Acts 2:24}

Let's look forward to this New Year knowing Jesus (Saviour) and Emmanuel (God with us)^{Matt.1:21-23} **and shut the door of the past knowing we are a new person - the old life is gone; a new life has begun**^{2Cor.5:16-17} **but** *press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*^{Phil.3:12-14}

Wishing you a Blessed and Prosperous New Year

Time Chart of OT

1270BC	Exodus under Ramesse 2 (<i>also called Ramesses the Great</i>)
1000BC	David
722BC	Israel's (<i>Northern Kingdom</i>) Exile 2Kings 17:6
597/6BC	Judah's (<i>Southern Kingdom</i>) 1 st Exile 2Kings24:10-17
586BC	Judah's (<i>Southern Kingdom</i>) 2 nd Exile 2Kings25:1-21
537BC	Judah's (<i>Southern Kingdom</i>) Return from Exile

Time Chart of NT

20/19BC	<i>Herod's Temple began</i>
18/17BC	<i>Herod's Temple in use</i>
c8BC	Zechariah in the Temple (Lk.1)
5BC April 5 th	Birth of Jesus
4BC	<i>Death of Herod the Great</i>
AD14 -37	<i>Reign of Tiberius Caesar</i>
AD29	Baptism of Jesus (<i>Lk. 3:1 – 15th year of Tiberius reign hence AD 29</i>)**
AD33 April Wed. 1 st	Last Supper (see Colin Humphreys' " <i>The Mystery of the Last Supper</i> ")
AD33 April Fri. 3 rd	Crucifixion of Jesus
c AD35	Conversion of Paul <i>Acts 9</i>
<AD37	<i>Christianity came to Britain. ***</i>
AD37-41	<i>Reign of Caligula</i>
AD41-54	<i>Reign of Claudius</i>
c AD44	<i>Death of Herod Agrippa 1</i>
< AD50	Letter of James
AD48-49	Paul's 1 st missionary journey
AD49/50	Jerusalem Conference <i>Acts. 15</i>
AD50	Paul's 2 nd missionary journey
AD50-52	Paul at Corinth
AD51	1 & 2 Thessalonians from Corinth
AD52	Galatians from Corinth
AD54	Paul's 3 rd missionary journey
AD54 -68	<i>Reign of Nero</i>
AD54-57	Paul at Ephesus
AD57	1Corinthians from Ephesus
AD57	2Corinthians from Macedonia
AD57/58	Romans from Corinth
AD58-60	Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea
AD58	Paul's arrest at Jerusalem
AD60-61	Paul winters at Malta
AD61	Paul arrives at Rome
AD61-63	Paul's imprisonment at Rome
AD62	Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon from Rome
AD63	Philippians from Rome
AD63-65	Paul's release & further ministry
AD63	1Timothy & Titus
AD64	Hebrews
AD64	<i>Herod's Temple finished</i>
<AD65	Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts
<AD65	Revelation****

AD64-68	1 & 2 Peter from Rome
AD65	Peter's death in Rome
AD66	Paul's 2 nd imprisonment at Rome
AD66	2 Timothy from Rome
AD66/67	Paul's death at Rome
AD67/68	Jude
<i>AD68</i>	<i>Death of Nero</i>
<i>AD68-69</i>	<i>Reign of Galba</i>
<i>AD69</i>	<i>Reign of Otho</i>
<i>AD69</i>	<i>Reign of Vitellius</i>
<i>AD69-79</i>	<i>Reign of Vespasian</i>
<i>AD70</i>	<i>Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus</i>
<i>AD79-81</i>	<i>Reign of Titus</i>
<AD98	Gospel John, 1, 2, & 3 John
AD98/100	Death of John
<i>AD81-96</i>	<i>Reign of Domitian</i>

****** Besides the dating from Tiberius, Daniel had stated that it would be 69 “*weeks*” before Messiah would appear from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:26). Accepting that a “*week*” represents seven years and the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was given around 455 BC (during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah), a specific period of 483 years (69 x 7) was to elapse before the Messiah would appear, dating Jesus’ Baptism at AD29 (*there is no date of 0BC or AD0*)

******* Gildas (A.D. 516-570) a British Historian, states, *Meanwhile, these islands ... received the beams of light that is, the Holy precepts of Christ, the true Sun at the latter part, as we know, of the reign of Tiberius Caesar* Roman Emperor A.D. 14-37

****** Reasons for early date for Revelation:**

42 months = the period between 64AD and 66AD when Nero embarked on the most violent campaign against Christians martyring multitudes.

666 = six hundred and sixty six, not six, six, six. It is the numerical value of “*Caesar Nero*”

The “*temple*” in the “*holy city*” is still standing as John writes, though it is being threatened with devastation (Rev. 11: 1-2). We know as a matter of historical fact that the Jewish temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, and has never been rebuilt. (2) The sixth “*king*” is presently ruling from the “*seven mountains*” and will do so until a king comes who will reign a “*short time*” (Rev. 17:9-10). The preterist takes this to be a clear enough allusion to Nero Caesar. According to the enumeration found in Josephus' *Antiquities* (18:2:2,6, 10) and Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Nero is Rome's sixth emperor, following Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius.

“...the cryptic number 666 (Revelation 13:18) designates Nero. The number involves the use of gematria (assigning numerical values to letters of the alphabet and thus determining the numerical value of words). Nero Caesar written in Hebrew letters has the numerical value of 666. That explanation becomes all the more probable when you realize that in Hebrew, Nero can also be spelled Neron. With the second “*n*” the numerical value is 666. Without it, 616 (a well-attested reading in some New Testament manuscripts).” J. Stewart Russell, *The Parousia*

"It is with great satisfaction that he finds himself in substantial agreement with the distinguished ecclesiastical historian and theologian, Dr. Dollinger, of Munich, in his interpretation of St. Paul's prediction in 2 Thessalonians. (1) Dr. Dollinger distinctly identifies the "*Man of Sin*" with Nero, a conclusion now so generally accepted by the highest authorities, that it may be regarded as a settled point. (2) He clearly distinguishes between the "*Man of Sin*" and "*the Apostasy*," so frequently confounded by the mass of interpreters. Dollinger shows that the former is a person, the latter a heresy. (3) He recognizes "*the Beast*" of the Apocalypse as the Emperor, and therefore identical with the "*Man of Sin*." (4) The miracles wrought by the "*Second Beast*" (the Beast from the earth) he regards as a representation derived from our Lord's prophecy on the Mount of Olives." (*The Parousia, Afterword*.)

The seven seals are shown to have taken place during the reign of the Emperors Augustus to Vespasian. The seven trumpets during the time when Rome placed 4 battalions at the Euphrates River (Rev. 9:14). The seven bowls, when Nero was Emperor (Rev. 17:10). But Revelation 20 makes the point that there is a long time gap between Jerusalem being judged and the events described in verse 9 by its use of the term "thousand years".

A. Corbett: Revelation.

Memory Verses - Prayer

January: I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Eph.3:16-17

February: And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Eph.3:17-18

March: Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. Eph.6:19

April: And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Phil.1:9

May: Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Phil.4:6

June: We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people. Col.1:3-4

July: We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way. Col.1:9-10

August: And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Col.3:17

September: And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Col.4:3-4

October: May God strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones. 1Thes.3:13

November: We constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. 2Thes.1:11

December: Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 2Thes.3:16



69 Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. CT14 9EW – www.dealpentecostal.co.uk